

DISCLAIMER: If you've read it before, it might not be mine. Main Characters and backstory belong to JKR. I write for my own amusement and hopefully yours and not for \$\$\$.

A/N: First of my fics publihsed. Be nice. Rating is for occasional bad language. You want graphic sex or extreme bloodshed - yes I have stories with that but this is not one of them.

CHAPTER ONE

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

She hated business trips really. She hated them because they took her away from her son and daughter. They were twins and only six years old. Fortunately, since her father died her mother and younger sister lived with her and watched over them when she was away. This trip was the worst in her opinion. It would be the longest time she spent away from her children since they were born. She had left home last night and would be here for a whole week. It was now Saturday morning and she was in the hotel lobby ordering her breakfast. The conference she was attending did not start until Monday, but her boss wanted her here early to make sure everything was in order. She checked last night when she checked in. Everything was in order and now she had nothing to do for the next two days.

Well, she thought, it's not like there's nothing to do. I am in New York City after all. Maybe I could do some shopping. She really had no idea what she would shop for. The business trips were the price she paid for her salary. She was now a Marketing Associate for Pak Riley Corporation, a major research and development firm in St. Louis. Her job was to sell their products and this conference could be a big deal maker for her company. It was both hers and their first major international exhibition and there would be potential buyers from all over the world - and most critically Europe. That was Monday. Today, she had nothing to do.

She had just ordered and was reading her complimentary paper waiting for her breakfast to arrive.

"May I join you?" A man's voice asked. "Every other table is full and I am famished."

She nodded but hoped he would not try and chat her up. She found that annoying in the extreme. "Thank you," he said. His voice was accented. He was not an American. Well, neither am I really, she thought. Unless she was mistaken, her new table companion was from Britain. So was she - once.

She listened to his accent as he ordered his breakfast and remembered a part of her thought of her life long ago. It seemed like that had not been her life at all.

"Bloody hate business trips," he said. "Annoying really." She nodded in agreement trying to read an article about some scandal or another. "Worse when I have to cross the pond," he continued. "Though it's easier flying west than it is flying east, don't you think?" She nodded absently.

"I guess it could be worse," he sighed.

She now wanted to tell him to be quiet. She wasn't in the mood for any conversation. She put down her paper and looked at the man at her table for the first time. She almost died of a heart attack she would later think when she saw who was seated at her table.

"Hermione Granger, I presume," he said. She knew him instantly. The raven hair and bright green eyes, she had known him years ago and this was the last place she thought she'd run into him. She could feel the blood drain from her face as her jaw dropped.

"Relax," he said. "This is just a coincidence. I'm here for some bloody conference regarding recent research and stuff. Bloody waste of time if you ask me. I'm a Field Agent, not a bloody R&D type. But I got tapped for this so there you go and here we are."

She wanted to leave, but now knew she could not. He was here for the same conference so this potentially awkward meeting was unavoidable - unless she wanted to lose her job. "Harry, I..." she started.

"I am pleased to see the rumors back home are unfounded," Harry said with a smile.

"Rumors?"

"Oh, there all kinds. The most common one is that you were killed and are moldering in some unmarked grave somewhere. Every few months since you left if there is a slow news day the Daily Prophet comes up with its new theory of what happened to Hermione Granger. My particular favorite is that you were really an alien and have returned to your home world." Harry chuckled. "It's really quite pathetic."

"Harry..."

"I understand if you don't want to tell me where you've been these last seven years. But forgive me if I am curious."

"Harry..."

"In case you're wondering, no I did not come looking for you after you disappeared. Wanted to. I really did. But things were so hectic I never found the time and when things calmed down I figured the trail had long since gone cold. No point then. It was obvious you were not coming back, so why look? So, what brings you to New York? I assume that's a safe question."

"Apparently the same thing that brought you here."

"Really? Buying or selling?"

"I'm a marketing agent for a company in St. Louis." And she explained to him what she did.

"You've been here a while, haven't you," Harry said when she finished.

"I only got in last night."

"No. I mean you've been living here in America for a while."

"How..."

"I'm a pretty good cop, Hermione. Your accent. There's still a trace of home, but it's barely noticeable. You talk like an American - not that there's anything wrong with that."

"I should think not. Cop? I thought you were an Auror."

"There have been a lot of changes back home since you left Hermione. A lot of changes. Perhaps a proper introduction is in order? I am Chief Inspector Harry Potter, Deputy Director, Major Crimes and Special Operations Department, Royal National Magical Police."

"What's that?"

"We deal with capital crimes in Britain: murder, rape, unforgivables and we conduct foreign operations against terrorists and the Voldemort remnants and wannabes. We reformed law enforcement soon after you left. Our police force is now modeled after the Magical Section of the American FBI. My Department deals with the worst of the mutts. Just closed a nasty serial killer case a few weeks ago. That was one sick puppy."

"Things have changed," Hermione observed.

"Whole government, in fact. The Ministry is now strictly the executive branch. Technically, we're part of the Ministry. In reality, the Minister's only control over us is through the budgeting process. The Wizengamot is gone. We now have an elected Parliament that passes laws and a separate court system to enforce them. You'd be pleased to learn that the House Elves have seats in the Legislature and their own bureau in the Ministry itself."

"Really?"

"Yep. You'd hardly recognize the place."

Hermione thought for a while. She had not seen Harry in almost seven years, not since the day he brought her to Heathrow. He seemed surprisingly cheerful. She wondered. She had left that day and never heard from him again, and yet he was acting as if nothing happened. She was sure he was upset with her disappearance. She would have been. She was. Had she been told she would run into him, she would have thought he'd be less of a stranger and more upset with her. Something was very different than she had expected.

"How's Ron," she finally asked?

"As I said," Harry replied, his mood suddenly sullen, "things have changed. I try not to think about him."

"Harry?"

Harry sighed. "I haven't spoken to Ron in years, Hermione. Our friendship ended the day he broke your heart."

"I - I never wanted that."

"I know. But you were not the self centered idiot who crushed my other best friend's soul for his own personal pleasure."

SATURDAY - JUNE 26, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry was watching his new television. Ginny was at home with her parents and would not be coming over for a few days and Harry was relaxing after a hard week at work. He was startled by a pounding on his door. He grumbled as he was enjoying the movie on the telly and went to the door. He opened it and Hermione was standing there in tears. She seemed almost hysterical and certainly inconsolable. She pushed passed him and into his living room. She ignored everything for a while before she finally realized he was there.

"Hermione?" Harry asked.

"It's OVER," she bawled!

"What is? What's over?"

"Ron and me!"

"I'm sure it's not that bad, Hermione."

"ARE YOU? WERE YOU THERE JUST NOW? IS SHAGGING ANOTHER WOMAN OKAY?"

"What? What are you talking about?" Harry could smell that she had been drinking.

"I wanted to surprise him. Term ended yesterday and the train came today and I decided to skip it and apparate to his flat and surprise him hours before the train arrived in London.," she cried. "I have a key, you know."

Harry nodded.

"So I walk in and hear - and hear a woman moaning from the living room, Harry! Calling HIS name! It sounded like - sex! So I went in and there was Ron bare assed and going at it with LAVENDER BROWN!"

There was nothing Harry could say in reply to his friend.

"They never noticed me, all wrapped up in each other as they were and I was too stunned to do anything. I slipped back into the hall, left Ron a note and my engagement ring. It's over!"

Harry nodded. He really did not know what else to do.

"Oooh, but he's sure to get the point! I caught him and he knows!"

"What do you mean, Hermione?"

"I didn't write the note on a piece of parchment! I used my wand and graffitied it on the walls of his fucking front hall. Made it indelible! No paint - other than black paint - will cover it up! He'll either have to paint his whole house black or replace the damn wall!" She seemed to shudder with a thrill for her ingenuity Harry noted. Harry also knew she was pissed: both angry and drunk. She never used such language before so far as he could remember.

"What time did you get to Ron's?" Harry asked.

"WHY THE HELL DO YOU CARE?"

"Because - well - you seem to have been drinking - a lot, Hermione."

"Why do you care?"

"Because I care about you, Hermione. I - I..."

"You do?"

Harry nodded. "You know I always have."

'Sometimes you've got a f-funny way of showin' it.'

Harry looked at her questioningly. When she was sober, all it took was a look to ask a question. She would know he wanted to know what she meant. He had looks for her, she had looks for him. Somehow, they could communicate without talking. Harry did not know if that silent communication worked when she was trashed.

"When Ron ran out on us during the War," she said. "Y-you ignored me."

"I did not," Harry protested!

"You let me bawl my eyes out! You didn't offer me a shoulder to cry on or anything!"

"I - I thought..."

"What?"

"I thought you needed your space."

"Damn it Harry! I needed you to be my friend!"

"I thought I was being your friend."

"Well, you were wrong! I wanted you to hold me and make the pain go away."

Harry started to tear up. He thought she had appreciated him leaving her alone and not - not doing anything he thought might violate their trust. For the first time, he now knew she had needed him and he had failed her. The revelation was killing him inside.

"I would have if..." Harry could not finish the sentence.

"IF WHAT," Hermione yelled.

"If you had asked," Harry replied.

"WHY SHOULD I? I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND!"

"I am, Hermione. I always have been and always will be. But, I was a stupid, seventeen year old boy who knew next to nothing about girls."

"And now?"

"Now I'm a stupid eighteen year old boy who knows next to nothing about girls."

"And w-what about me?" she asked in a scared voice.

"I - I know you probably better than anyone," Harry said softly. "But I cannot read your mind. Like to, but that would be rude. While I'd like to think I'm pretty good at reading you..."

"You are," she said. She then laughed for some reason Harry could not fathom.

"I also know I'm not perfect. I'm sorry, Hermione. Sorry for not being there for you then. I'm here for you now, though."

She smiled at him for a moment, but then her face changed. Her mouth opened as if in pain. Her eyes crushed themselves shut and Harry could see tears falling and saw her shoulders heaving, even though she made no sound at all. Her hands were pulled up under her chin as she shook with silent tears.

I'm here for her now, Harry thought. He walked up to her and pulled her into a hug. Gently, he pulled her head to his chest and felt her shake and felt her tears. Finally, she began to cry vocally, and he pulled her as close as he could, rubbing her back and kissing her beautiful - if seemingly unmanageable brown, curly hair. He could not help but smell her and to his embarrassment was enraptured by the smell. He wanted her even closer, but prayed she kept her arms in front of her. His "involuntary" reaction to holding his friend and beautiful young woman - he thought - so close scared him and, should she realize it might scare her as well. He did not want that. All he wanted - all he had ever wanted for her - was for Hermione to be happy.

As she cried, he was lost in thought. Ron was his best mate, had been since he first met Ron almost eight years ago. Hermione, however, was his best friend - again practically since they first met almost eight years ago. He could tell her things he could never tell anyone else. Ron and he had had their fights over the years. Most arose because Ron had a massive inferiority complex, which Harry thought might explain what Hermione had walked in to find a few hours ago. Hermione and Harry had had their tiffs as well. But there was a difference. She never stopped caring for him and their spats were when she had done what she thought was best for him and he acted like an immature git as a result.

He had always feared this day. Ron and Hermione had begun dating officially about a year ago, just as the War ended. Deep down, there was a part of Harry that wanted her too, but she seemed to have a thing for Ron and Ron for her and he knew it. He feared what would happen if either he or Ron had started dating Hermione and then the relationship failed. He knew he would have to take a side - Ron or Hermione. He feared losing either or both of his best friends. Now, that day was here. To Harry's surprise, the choice was easy: Hermione!

"It's okay," Harry whispered.

"It's NOT okay," she cried back. "H-he b-broke m-my heart! I h-hate him!"

"I know."

"I NEVER WANT TO SEE THAT BASTARD AGAIN!"

Part of Harry hoped that was not true. Another part knew she was serious and meant it. Hermione was not perfect - who was? But one thing this broken friend of his was not and would never be was a doormat. Lavender was. Maybe that was what Ron wanted in a girlfriend - someone he could treat like dirt and get away with it.

"Then don't," Harry said.

"W-what? B-b-but I love him!"

"And he obviously does not love you," Harry said.

"H-h-how can y-you s-say th-that? D-d-did h-he t-t-tell y-y-you?"

"No. But if he loved you - truly loved you - you would not be here now and he would not have been..."

"FUCK HIM," Hermione wailed!

"Sorry."

"What?"

"Don't like Lavender's sloppy seconds," Harry quipped.

"Bastard!"

Harry shrugged and tightened the hug.

"He broke my heart, Harry," she cried.

"I know," Harry said soothingly.

"AGAIN!"

"I know."

"HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID!"

"Hush! You're not stupid, Hermione. You're the smartest, kindest and most special person I've ever known."

"And yet I couldn't see this!"

"That makes two of us, Hermione. Until just now, I had no reason to think that he was..."

"You were here - in London - with him all this year! I was stuck in school, Harry! What do you mean you did not know?"

"He got his own flat, you know."

"I know. I helped him pick it out. He didn't..."

"Didn't want to be beholden to me for a place to live. Goodness knows, Hermione, I offered him a room here. You know he flat out refused. Bugger hated feeling like he was second class or something. You remember, don't you?"

She chuckled reluctantly. Ron could be such an insecure git, she thought.

TUESDAY - JULY 14, 1998 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

The "Golden Trio," Harry scoffed. Another one of the totally stupid names the press had forced upon him over his brief lifetime, Harry thought, except now they dragged his two best friends into that cesspool with him. Bah! So what? So we beat - killed - the most dangerous Dark Wizard in memory? So what? I'm not even eighteen! You bastards want to lionize me and my friends? Wait until we have a lifetime of accomplishments, not a moment's fleeting glory in the sun at the dawn of our young lives! But the press has a bloody nutter of a mind of its own, Harry thought.

He and his two best friends stood at the door of the house he had inherited from his Godfather. Over the past couple of weeks Harry had the place completely renovated while he, Ron and Hermione lived at Ron's parent's place - the Burrow. Harry was now moving in at last. He had brought his friends here to make them an offer. They were all acting Aurors now, hunting down the remnants of Voldemort's followers. Hermione was only a temp as she intended to return for her final year of school. Harry and Ron (and Neville, for that matter) were now permanent additions to the elite Auror Corps, the youngest ever. Then again, as most of the Corps died in the war, their youth was not that unexpected given their wartime accomplishments.

Grimmauld Place had been an old, dark, horribly out of date Garden House near the Camden Towne section of London. It was large. Below the Ground Floor was a large basement which contained the Kitchen. It then had a Ground Floor, three upper floors and an attic. There had been a guest bedroom on the First Floor along with the Drawing Room. The Ground Floor had a Parlor and the Dining Room. A Study / Library and another bedroom had occupied the Second Floor. The Master Suites were on the Third Floor, and two bedrooms were in the Attic. It had been practically gutted in the

renovation. The Ground Floor and First Floor were mostly open spaces now. The Ground Floor was the "public room" for dining and entertaining. The First Floor was now the main room for relaxation and less formal gatherings, although it also contained the guest bedroom as Harry thought of it. Harry's study / library and a bedroom occupied the second floor. The rest of the floor plans were virtually unchanged, but the rooms - except for the two attic rooms (for now) had been renovated.

Harry was having electricity, telephones, cable television and internet installed. Although Harry had a House Elf as a servant, he had installed modern "Muggle" (non-magical) appliances in the old kitchen. Harry had been forced to cook for his Aunt and Uncle as a boy. While he hated cooking for them he did enjoy cooking and was more than willing to expand his talents in that arena now that he had a place of his own. Maybe not every meal, but he did like to experiment with his cooking. Although he could use magic to cook, having been brought up in a non-magical house he preferred to "cook by hand" as Ron derisively called the method used by most of the world.

Out back of the house was a large but long neglected garden that was now his House Elf Kreature's main task in life. Behind the garden there was an old Carriage House he had renovated into a garage. The house had an upper floor that had been servant's quarters when the place was built in the 1850's. It had been filled with ages of junk. He had turned it into a recreation room. The ground level was now a four car garage. He was thinking about learning to drive and buying a car.

"So," he said after he gave his friends the grand tour, "what do you think?"

"I hardly recognize the place, Harry," Hermione said. "It's lovely!"

"It'll do I suppose," Ron moped. Ron had issues with money. More annoyingly Ron had issues with the fact that Harry had lots of it inherited from his family and his Godfather.

"You two are more than welcome to live here," he said.

"That would be wonderful," Hermione said, looking at her boyfriend

Ron.

"I don't know," Ron said. "I mean, I guess for a bit. But I'm dating Hermione now and your dating my sister and unless I am seriously mistaken, both are pretty serious. I really don't want to know what you and my baby sister are up to, if you know what I mean. I'm sure you don't want to know what Hermione and I are..."

"RON," Hermione shot back!

"Dear? I mean - well..."

"It's a big house, Ron," Harry said. "Much too big for one person. It's not like Gin and I are going to be married anytime soon. She still has another year of school and..."

"And I already told you, Ronald," Hermione said crossly, "I am going back to take my final year."

"You know you don't have to," Ron complained.

"I WANT TO! You know I want to take my exams!"

"But 'Mione, you don't need to! You can be an Auror..."

"Maybe I don't want to be one Ronald. Did you ever think of that? Did you? Maybe I want to do something different."

"Like what?"

"I DON'T KNOW! Look, Ronald. Maybe you think chasing around after Dark Wizards is loads of fun, but I don't! The only reason I have done that and am doing it is because of you two. But I know I don't want to do that for the rest of my life. I want to keep my options open!"

"I'm just saying..."

"DON'T! DON'T SAY ANYTHING! Damn it Ronald, I want to do something else. I just don't know what yet, okay?"

"I - I guess."

"And I think living here - at least at first is brilliant!"

"Damn it I don't!"

"Why not?" Harry and Hermione asked.

"I told you! I don't want to know what Ginny and Harry are up to, okay?"

"Is that it, Ronald?" Hermione asked.

"Yes - well - no! I can afford a flat now. I want a place of my own - of our own, 'Mione."

"Oh," she said. "I guess..."

"Thank you," Ron replied! "Look. We can stay here until you go back to school or so. But by then I want our own flat, okay?"

"Sounds great," Hermione said. Harry was not convinced she was sincere.

"Besides, I don't want - well - I hate playing poor! I won't live off of charity - even Harry's."

"He did not make the offer out of charity. He did it as a friend!"

"Yeah? Well maybe he did..."

"I did," Harry added.

"But the rest of the blighters will think I live here 'cause I can't afford a decent place of my own. I am sick of that, okay?"

The other two knew Ron well enough to know this was not worth the effort of arguing over. He had real issues with looking poor. Always had.

SATURDAY - JUNE 26, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

"Git probably got the place for his shagging pleasure," Hermione wailed. "Damn it Harry! This place is huge! Privacy would not have been an issue. I tried to tell him but he refused to listen. Son of a bitch wanted his bachelor pad so he could shag tarts while I was off at school. Did it matter we were engaged? Apparently not. BASTARD!"

"Hermione?"

"Damn it, Harry! You're supposed to be my best friend! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me Ron was fucking around on me!"

"I - I didn't know." Harry was shocked at her language. Then again, she smelled like she'd been drinking all day.

She looked at him in disbelief.

"Honestly, Hermione. I did not! I never popped by there unannounced. That's just rude. It fucking began bothering me when he would do the same. Git made a point of it during the Hols if he even thought there was a remote chance Gin was here. I like my privacy, okay? I don't invite tarts here for a cheap shag, but I like being left alone for a time. I do my socializing away from here. I assumed he would be the same way. I had no idea he was screwing around. I swear!"

She looked at Harry intently. She knew, even in her inebriated state, she knew he was telling her the truth. "When did the git learn to lie?" She asked rhetorically.

"What?"

"Come on, Harry! Ron could not lie to save his life. Not really."

"He did during the war."

"So he claims. Okay fine! He could not lie to us to save his life."

Harry nodded for it had been true.

"But he can now," Hermione continued. "What changed?"

Harry shrugged.

"Lying bastard," she said. "All this year he wrote me. He wrote and told me how much he loved me and missed me. His letters were sweet, but seemed canned somehow."

"Canned?" Harry asked.

"Like someone else wrote them. Bit too smooth for Ron, I should have seen it. Still. Damn it! I was in love with the bastard. Still..."

"I invited him to come up for each Hogsmeade Weekend. He always had an excuse and never came."

"He," Harry began. "Damn it all! I'm so sorry, Hermione."

"What?"

"I made every Weekend except one to visit Gin," Harry said. "One! As hectic as things are at the office, I could still find a few weekends to take off. I made it to all of her matches. All of them! And I've been on loads foreign and undercover assignments! Ron's not trusted with those. He has an aversion to all things Muggle, he does. He only did four in the last year and they were all during the week. He's damn good at take downs - fights - but useless at the more cloak and dagger sort of missions. Take downs are few and far between. Takes months to run a perp to the ground. The other assignments are frequent. In a way, you were lucky today. Odds are, I would not be here. Damn!"

"R-Ron said he w-was so busy," Hermione whimpered.

"He wasn't that busy. Damn it! The bastard!"

"Wh-what are you saying?"

"I don't know! Sorry, Hermione, I don't. But damn it! The git was not that busy. He could have easily spared a little time for you. Damn it! Why didn't I see it?"

"H-how c-could you know?"

"I was there! I never saw you or Ron or...Damn it all!"

'G-Ginny never told you?"

"She never did."

"I - I asked her to. I asked her to find out what Ron was up to. I asked her to tell me why he could not see me. I asked her to ask you. She never did?"

Harry shook his head.

"Bitch!"

"Hey," Harry protested!

"Sorry Harry. Maybe she forgot. It's been a bad day."

"Please don't take it out on her."

"She's supposed to be my friend!"

"She's also miffed at you."

"Why?"

"Because she says I am closer to you than to her and..."

"Harry, we've been best friends forever. She's..."

"I know. Still, it pisses her off that you and I are so close. She knows there's nothing going on, still..."

"Weasley jealousy?"

"Yeah. Throw in the fact that you were Head Girl. Her Mum was - well - she told her that how could Gin expect that honor? You were a far better student and... Still, Molly would have preferred..."

"Damn it all," Hermione exclaimed. "Fucking Weasleys! I did not covet that position!"

"I know."

"I earned it!"

"I know, Hermione."

"I need a drink!"

"Hermione, what?"

"I need a bloody belt! Got any booze in this palace?"

"You sure?"

"You're not my Daddy! I'm of age! I can have a bloody belt if I want one! If you have one! Otherwise, it's back to the Pub."

"Pub?"

"Spent a few hours there before coming over. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"I - erm."

"Well? You going to offer me a drink or what?"

"I really don't think you should..."

"I told you! You're not my goddamned Daddy! This day sucks! My life sucks! I want a drink!"

"It doesn't help, believe me."

"I DON'T CARE!"

Harry resigned. He pointed her to his bar. Better here, he thought, than in some Pub. Goodness knows what might happen to her there.

Harry watched as Hermione walked over to his bar and poured herself a disturbingly large glass of scotch.

"Hermione, are you sure you should..."

"After this afternoon, FUCK IT! I GETTING PISSED!"

"Hermione!"

"Don't Harry! Don't," she said in a near rage as she drained the glass and nearly coughed herself into oblivion. "Never had that before," she said when she regained a bit of control. She refilled her glass a couple of times, but she faded fast and was soon lying on Harry's couch drunk. Harry had never seen Hermione like this and it scared him. It scared him even more that he had no idea what to do. She was fading fast and her eyes were closing. "I love you, Harry," she slurred.

She was drunk, Harry thought - really drunk.

"Love you too," he said. He found a blanket Mrs. Weasley had knitted for him and placed it over her as she passed out. He kissed her forehead and heard an unintelligible mumble in reply. He then went upstairs to bed.

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Harry always wondered if she remembered what she said just before she fell asleep that night or what he said to her. He always wondered if she meant it and if so how she meant it.

CHAPTER TWO

SUNDAY - JUNE 29, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry woke up late the next morning. It was a Sunday and he usually slept in. He had forgotten Hermione had passed out on his couch. He went down to make his breakfast and a acrid odor hit him. He then remembered Hermione. He walked into the living room and saw she had been sick all over his couch, floor, blanket and herself. At least she was still breathing, he thought, although she's going to regret that bit as soon as she starts to wake up. He decided to do his best to put off that misery for her as long as possible.

She moaned as he picked her up from the couch. He carried her to the guest room on the First Floor. With his hands full, he could not use a wand to do anything but the last year's intensive training had taught him how to use magic without any wand at all. The bed linens seemed to turn down on their own as he gently placed Hermione onto the bed. He removed her soiled blouse and slacks and blushed at seeing her in nothing but her underwear. He then tucked her in and cast a spell that would keep the room dark and another that would prevent any noise from outside to disturb her sleep. He closed the door and then left his house to deliver Hermione's clothes to the dry cleaner a block away.

When he returned he noticed a trunk and two large suitcases in his front hall he had not noticed before. Each had a noticeable "H.G." monogram. He was so preoccupied with his upset, then drunk, then sick friend, he had not noticed she had brought her luggage with her. He carried the bags up and quietly placed them in her room before retuning to clean his living room.

There was a knock at the door and Harry stopped cleaning the couch to answer it. He opened the door and his friend and Hermione's former fiancé - as of last night - was standing at the door.

"Is Hermione here?" Ron asked with more than a hint of desperation.

Harry nodded and Ron smiled slightly. "Good! I need to talk to her." His nose wrinkled at something. "What's that smell?"

"Puke," Harry said. "Hermione's somewhere between drop dead drunk and suffering from the worst hangover of her life."

"Drunk?" Ron asked. "Hermione never..."

"She was lit when she showed up and then downed far more scotch than would be advisable under any circumstances. Passed out and threw up all over the place. I don't think she'll be talking to anyone for quite some time. Maybe not until tomorrow."

If it was possible for Ron to become any paler, he just did. "What happened?"

"You tell me, Ron," Harry said getting a little annoyed.

Ron shrugged. "Always said she was mental."

"RON, YOU ARE THICK!" Harry yelled. "She came over here three sheets to the wind. She said she caught you and Lavender shagging each other's brains out yesterday afternoon, left you a message and left. My guess is she spent the next several hours in a pub somewhere."

Ron's expression seemed to be a cross between fear and surprise. "She saw that?"

"So you were getting shagged?"

"It's not what either of you think, Harry."

"What is it then?" There was real hostility in Harry's voice.

"It's nothing, really. Lavender's just got an itch that needs scratching is all and Hermione wasn't supposed to be there and - well Lavender means nothing, really."

"Maybe not to you, but to Hermione she means everything, Ron."

"Well, it's her bloody fault," Ron started. "What does she expect me to do? She's holding out on me - waiting for marriage, she says. So why shouldn't I get lucky now and then?"

"Ron, just 'cause she's holding out does not mean..."

"Don't bloody lecture me, Harry! You've been shagging my sister since she turned seventeen! You two didn't wait! Why should we?"

"I would have, Ron. And you should because that's what she wants."

"Mental," Ron mumbled.

"What do you think Ginny would do to me if she thought I was dipping my quill in another ink well."

"She'd kill you but..."

"She would kill me regardless of whether we were doing it or not. Dipping your wick might not be a big deal to you, but it's a huge deal to women. Don't be surprised if Lavender thinks there's more to the two of you than just your willingness to scratch her itch!"

After a long pause, Ron said: "It's Hermione I love, you know."

"And right now she hates you, Ron. Maybe she'll get over it. But don't expect her to soon. Even when she gets over her current condition, I doubt she'll talk to you. Maybe when she gets back..."

MONDAY - JUNE 28, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

"What happened to me the other night?" Hermione asked Harry having just finished three large helpings of his lasagna.

"You were drunk, you got drunker, you passed out, you threw up," Harry replied.

"Sorry Harry."

Harry shrugged.

"Nothing happened between us?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"When I finally woke up, my clothes were gone."

"You threw up on them."

Hermione nodded.

"I took them to the dry cleaners and they are in the hall closet."

"Thanks Harry."

"Do you remember why you were so drunk?"

"I left Ron," she huffed.

"Just making sure."

"I can stay here, right? At least until I leave to find my parents?"

"When's that?"

"My flight is on the tenth."

"Yes, you can stay. But I can't take off work to keep you company."

"I wouldn't ask that of you Harry, thank you." Harry saw tears in her eyes.

"I have nowhere else to go, Harry."

"You're always welcome here, Hermione."

Hermione smiled. Harry could not smile back as he placed her dinner before her and took his seat across from her. She was a wreck when she arrived and yesterday, when she finally woke up, she was horribly hung over. She did not say much at all, too sick to talk Harry figured. He merely asked her what she remembered - if anything - from the day before. She remembered most of it.

"Ron talked to me at work today," Harry said. Hermione merely grunted.

"He was here yesterday as well when you were..." She merely shrugged. "He wants to talk to you."

"Fat chance," Hermione said. "Are you suggesting he should? Are you trying to help him get me back, because if you are..." She was beginning to get angry.

"No I am not," Harry said firmly. "Merely relaying the message."

"Good, 'cause I never want to see him again!"

Harry nodded. "You probably should tell him that - in person."

"WHY WOULD I WANT TO DO THAT? WHY?"

"I'm not saying you should want to," Harry said calmly. "He seems to think you making a big deal about nothing."

"WHAT?"

"Practically his words. Thinks if you two talk, this will blow over."

"And what do you think, Harry?" She said icily.

"Stupid git's got his head so far up his ass he as to fart to breath," Harry deadpanned.

She calmed down and actually smiled again. "What did you tell him?"

"Told him there was a better chance that Voldemort would return than you would."

She actually laughed. "How'd he take that?"

"Asked who's side I was on."

"And?"

"I told him the right side."

"What'd he say?"

EARLIER THAT DAY

"Thank goodness! I was afraid you might pick her over me," Ron said. "So you'll help me?"

"No," Harry said gravely. "I told you I picked the right side."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You brought this one on all by yourself. I'll relay a message, but I am not going to help you fix this."

"But Harry! I thought we were mates?"

"Right now, the operative word is 'were.' You broke her heart, Ron. I'll be damned if I knowingly give you a chance to do it again."

"So, you're picking her over me?"

"You made that choice, Ron! You did! She was your fiancé. You're supposed to remain faithful to..."

"That's a load of dung! It's not like we're actually married yet!"

"Should be."

"So you're telling me you have not had an occasional roll in the sack when Ginny was away?"

"I have not."

"I don't believe you!"

"Fine. Don't. But it is true."

"Mental. They all are!"

"Perhaps," Harry said.

"So she's staying with you?"

"Far as I know she has nowhere else to go, so yeah, I guess."

"What do you mean nowhere else to go? What about her parents?"

"Still in Australia."

"Oh. The Burrow?"

"I don't think she's in the mood for dealing with your family."

"The Leaky Cauldron, then."

"Not sure how she's fixed for money, Ron. Even if she has some, her trip to find her parents won't come cheap."

"Kick her out! Kick her out!"

"I'm not going to do that Ron."

"Fine, but I'm telling Ginny!"

"Fine."

MONDAY - JUNE 28, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

"So," Hermione said with anger, "he wants you to help him get us back together and yet he also wants you to kick me out in the cold?"

"Basically."

"Is he mental?"

"I - ," Harry shrugged.

"Does he honestly think I'll go running back to him and beg him to take me back again?"

Harry shrugged. "Maybe there's a chapter in that damned book of his that tells how to win back the witch you cheated on."

"Book? What book? What are you talking about?"

"I'll show you," Harry said and he got up from the table. "Back in a bit." He came back later and handed her a book that looked brand new.

"Twelve Fail Safe Ways to Charm Witches," she asked? "WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS THIS ABOUT?"

Harry shrugged.

"YOU DON'T KNOW?"

"Never bothered to read it," Harry admitted. "Ron has. Swears by it. Some kind of dating guide, I think."

"Why do you have a copy," Hermione asked suspiciously?

"He gave me one for my seventeenth birthday. Told me it works wonders."

"Did he now?" She practically growled.

"You two were getting along pretty well at the time as I recall."

"Only because he seemed to be ... you mean?"

"Probably got some pointers from that thing," Harry smiled.

"I don't know whether I should be flattered or insulted!"

Harry looked into her eyes and raised an eyebrow.

"I mean, I guess it was something to get the git to actually read a book. But to think he used it to get me? I think insulted! IF HE THINKS FOR ONE MINUTE I AM GOING TO TAKE HIM BACK..."

"He told me he does."

"HE'S MISTAKEN!"

Harry nodded. "I happen to agree with you, 'Mione. Cheating on a floozy like Lavender is one thing. Cheating on you, totally different. Seems he's been doing both."

"WHAT? How do you know?"

"Git told me today. Said something about taking advantage of our overseas assignments to - well."

"Dip his wick?"

"Didn't come right out and say it, but yeah."

"How did that come up?"

"He could not believe I remain faithful to Ginny."

"He can be thick, BUT I NEVER KNEW HE WAS THAT STUPID! IMMATURE! INSECURE! FUCK HIM!"

"No thanks," Harry said. "Seems everybody has."

Hermione actually laughed.

"Slut boy," Harry added and was rewarded with another laugh.

"You really are on my side in this, Harry?"

"I am. You're right, he's wrong."

"And Ginny? Where do you think she'll come down?"

"If my guess is right, she'll be pissed as hell for not supporting her brother."

"WHAT?"

"Weasleys are strange that way, haven't you noticed? They can hate each other, but an outsider - like you or me - an outsider mess with them? They band together against you."

"And you are willing to..."

"You're right, he's wrong. He has no right to break your heart and then expect me to be okay with it. No right to expect me not to take your side, Hermione. NONE!"

"And if Ginny sides with her family?"

"If she truly loves me, she won't."

"And if she does?"

"Hermione, I pick you."

"Th-thank you, Harry," she said softly.

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"You haven't spoken to Ron in years," Hermione asked?

"Not since the divorce. Even before then, we were hardly friends."

"Divorce? Hardly friends?"

"To begin with, he never really forgave me for taking your side after the 'Lavender Incident.' Never. I never really cared because you were right and he was wrong. Best mates before, after Ron and I were not chummy at all. We were civil to one another for a while - had to be considering I did marry his sister. But when I divorced her, well..."

"You divorced?"

"Technically, it was an annulment under the law."

"But I thought she dumped you!"

"She did - for a time..."

FRIDAY - JULY 2, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

"Ginny's coming over," Harry said over dinner.

"Great," Hermione said happily. Ginny was her best girlfriend. "I'd love to see her!"

"I don't know. I don't think you would now."

"Why?"

"I think she's pissed at me because you're here. You left Ron, which makes you a traitor in her book and are here with me which makes you a threat. Something tells me I'm not getting lucky tonight."

"I'm sure you're exaggerating, Harry."

"She has a short temper and a jealous streak," Harry said. "And she's furious I am refusing to do what she wants me to do."

"What's that?"

"Kick you out."

"She never said that."

"No, but that's what she meant. She never understood us, Hermione. Never. She thinks there's more to us than just being friends."

"But..."

Deep down Hermione now knew she and Harry were more than just friends and she hoped Harry knew it too. They had been practically in love since they met on the train to school all those years ago. She would do anything for him, anything! She knew it was at least almost the same for him, but he could be so thick about his emotions and such! She began to realize, finally, that she was in love with Harry - truly - and had been for ages. Ron was a fancy, not much more. She had been with Ron because he acted like a boyfriend. But it was displaced love? Like displaced aggression maybe? Now there was a thought. It is and always has been Harry. Not the bloody 'Boy-Who-Lived' - HARRY! If only he felt the same way about me, she thought sadly. Little did she know, he did. He had yet to admit it to himself, but for years all others had been compared to her and found wanting - even Ginny.

The doorbell rang. At least, Harry thought, at least she - meaning Ginny - had the decency to ring the bell.

"Ah! The Wicked Witch of the West! Speak of the Devil," Harry laughed.

"HARRY," Hermione shot back!

"Just a joke," Harry said. I hope - he thought to himself. He got up to answer the door.

"Ginny," Harry said seeing his fiancé at the door. He leaned in for a hug and a kiss and found nothing.

"Don't bother Potter," she hissed. "Is that bitch hear?"

"Bitch?"

"You know!"

"Nope. No Lavender Brown here, Gin. Sorry. Try Ron's place."

"I MEANT HERMIONE!"

"What's your problem with Hermione?"

"SHE DUMPED MY BROTHER!"

"Actually, it was kind of the other way around, Gin."

"NO IT WASN'T! WHAT DID MY BROTHER EVER DO TO DESERVE THAT?"

"Oh, let's see? Fuck around? Get caught shagging Lavender only a few days ago? Admit to getting shagged on overseas assignment? Basically spend the last year getting shagged left and right while his fiancé was at school?"

"HE DID NOT!"

"Most certainly, he did. Git admitted as much to me! Didn't seem to be a concern for him at all!"

"So you're taking her side in this?"

"Lavender's? Hardly."

"HERMIONE'S, YOU GIT!"

"Of course. Ron's the bitch in this one, Gin."

"HE'S MY BROTHER!"

"So's Percy. So what?"

"HE'S YOUR BEST FRIEND!"

"Was. No more."

"KICK HER OUT!"

"I told you Lav-Lav is not here."

"HERMIONE! KICK HER OUT OR ELSE!"

"What?"

"OR ELSE WE'RE THROUGH!"

"Nice knowing you, Gin. Have a nice life. Good night," Harry said exceedingly calmly.

"WHAT?"

"I said 'Good night.' That means LEAVE!"

"YOU MUST BE JOKING!"

"You can keep the ring, if you like. But LEAVE!"

"You're throwing away all we have..."

"If you support your git brother, we have nothing."

"I can't believe this! He's a hero!"

"He's a bigger git than Malfoy."

"MALFOY'S A DEATH EATER!"

"He saw the light, Gin. He's still a world class ass, but at least he doesn't pretend not to be. Same can't be said for the useless waste of air you call a brother."

"HE'S A WEASLEY!"

"In that case, same applies to you. Have a nice life, Gin."

"You can't."

"I just did. See you."

"Y-you c-can't. You love me..."

"True. But not right now. If you come back and apologize, if you realize your brother is a tart tracker and admit it, then maybe you are worth my time and affection."

"YOU CAN'T!"

"I'm not kicking Hermione out."

"I DEMAND YOU DO!"

"Sorry. Ain't happening."

"FINE! WE'RE OVER! I HOPE YOU BURN IN HELL!"

"Sorry. Already have, Gin. Good night."

Harry then closed the door. He ignored her pounding and ended up placing a silencing charm on the door, as well as additional wards on the house to keep Ginny out.

"Harry," Hermione said in a hurt voice. Harry turned and saw tears flowing from her big, brown eyes. "Maybe I should leave. Maybe I should stay at the Leaky Cauldron or something."

"NO," Harry said! Hermione could not tell if he was angry, scared or desperate.

"It would be better for everyone," she began.

"No! No it would not. This isn't your fault. None of this is your fault, Hermione."

"Harry..."

"No! Ever since we've know each other, you've gone out of your way to help me. You've made sacrifices I never asked for to help me.

You helped me no matter what the cost to you. You are the most selfless and caring person I've ever known and I've never..."

"Harry?"

"I've never really thanked you or repaid the favor."

"You don't have to."

"Yes I do!"

"But I've ruined..."

"I told you, Hermione, none of this is your fault. NONE OF IT! You are the victim here. Not me nor the others. Everything that seems to be going wrong all boils down to an immature, insecure git named Ronald Weasley."

"I cost you his friendship," she cried.

"HE COST ME HIS FRIENDSHIP," Harry replied. "He broke your heart. He did it in the cruelest and most selfish way imaginable. I don't think I can ever forgive him for that. YOU DID NOT DESERVE THAT."

"I must have done something for him to..."

"The only thing you did was give him your heart so he could gleefully stomp on it, Hermione. The git has not told me everything, and I doubt he ever will. But, my guess is he's been taking advantage of his fame and small fortune since not long after you boarded the Hogwarts Express last September. He did what he did because he thought he could and you'd be none the wiser."

"Perhaps if I had let him..."

"No! He used that as an excuse, Hermione! If he truly loved you, he would have respected your decision and would have honored his commitment to you. That respect and honor went out the door soon after you were out of sight as far as I can figure."

"Harry..."

"This is NOT your fault. None of it. Letting you stay here is the least I can do for you."

"But Ginny?"

"Should realize that at some point her new family - meaning me - is supposed to be more important than her old family when it counts. She does not see that. Maybe she never will. She's acting like a spoiled child and so long as she does, I am not interested."

"But I've cost you your best mate, your fiancé,,,"

"It's not your fault, Hermione. It's not. Ron cost me his friendship and it's because of her ignorant loyalty to a brother she could barely stand that Ginny is out of my life for now. None of that is your fault. You've made sacrifices for me, Hermione. It's my turn to make sacrifices for you."

"W-why?"

"Everyone I've ever cared about has either died or left me. Everyone except you. You're the best friend I've ever had and can ever hope to have and I can't lose you too. I want to help you because I love you, Hermione."

"You - you what?"

"I love you, Hermione," Harry said. "That's what friends do."

"Oh," she said. She did not understand why she was so disappointed in that statement. Still...

"Thank you Harry," she said walking into a hug. "I love you too. But I'm leaving you too, you know." She felt Harry nod. "I don't know when I'll be back." Or if, she thought.

"I know," Harry said.

Does he really?

"But no matter how long you're away, I want to know that there is one true friend out there - one person who loves me."

"I will always," Hermione whispered.

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"As you may recall, Hermione," Harry said, "I also kind of dumped her as well."

Hermione chuckled a little. "You did indeed. But I seem to recall that most thought she dumped you."

"What?" Harry said in mock shock. "Well of course she did. Little Princess had never been dumped before and would be damned if she ever really was. The papers were all on about how I humiliated her - not that I gave a rat's fart about the papers by then. The only morons more useless than the Rita Skeeters of this world are the idiots who read the trash. Much to my regret, a few months later, she came back begging me to forgive her and I did. Second biggest mistake of my life."

"Second biggest?"

"Ginny and I married in December 1999. I divorced her about three years later. That marriage was a bloody nightmare from the beginning. Should have known better than to marry a 'Boy-Who-Lived' groupie. She wanted the fame and all that and I wanted no part of it. She did not care about me really. She's a professional Quiddich player, you know. Signed with the Harpies not long after you left. How did I her fiancé find out? Did she tell me? Nope. Read about it in the sports section. She's a great player, you know. Captained England in the last World Cup and England won for the first time in 300 years. Outside of Quiddich, she's useless. She was never around. Wanted me to quit my job to carry her friggin' bags. When we were home together we always got into a fight. Didn't take long to realize she did not really want to have kids or a family, just the name and glory. So I divorced her. It was not pretty. She wanted half my estate - HALF. By then she was the highest paid player in the league. The Court saw reason. She got 500 Galleons. Didn't even cover her legal bills," Harry chuckled. "Ron was furious I left her without a cent, as it were. We had words and he can rot. The only silver lining was we had no kids."

"I'm sorry, Harry."

"Don't be. I was sick of her by then. I wanted out. I was thinking of 'pulling a Granger,' as they said back then and just taking off. A friend of mine found an 'out' clause. Technically, it was not a divorce, it was an annulment. Legally, we never were married."

"What?"

"The conditions necessary to form a legally binding contract were not met. It would take a while to explain, but the bottom line is that sham of a marriage was declared invalid and I was freed from that red-headed nightmare. Haven't heard from her since."

"I thought you liked her at least."

"I did once. The whole 'Lavender Incident' changed everything. Ron was a git. Gin was a sex pot, but a groupie. Still, for some pathetic reason I did marry her. The experience is probably why I've been single ever since."

"W-why," Hermione wondered why she was pleased to hear that.

Harry shrugged. "I never knew much about women," he admitted. "Still don't it seems. Then again, I am considered the most eligible bachelor in all wizarding Europe so most of the women I meet see my fame and bank accounts and not me. If it weren't for my job, I might just be miserable. Oh well."

"I'm sorry, Harry."

"Why? It's not your fault."

"I - I just... All I ever wanted was for you to be happy. It's clear you're not. I'm sorry."

"Hermione, it's not your fault. It's mine. I followed a path that I thought was mine and it wasn't. Warning signs everywhere and I ignored them. You might have seen them, you always did. I didn't."

"The 'Lavender Incident' should have taught me to stay clear of the 'she-weasel' as a good friend of mine calls Ginny these days. He saw right through her from the start. But, I didn't trust him back then."

Still don't, not entirely. Burned one time too many, I suppose. Still, Malfoy can be..."

"Malfoy," Hermione asked in shock? "You mean Draco Malfoy?"

"Irony, isn't it? He can still be an ass, but he's a good friend now. He was a friend even then, though no one knew it at the time."

"I don't believe it!"

"Sad but true. Ron and I were never close after that summer. Malfoy was soon an up and comer in the Chief Prosecutor's Office. They say I catch 'em, he fries 'em. We became the one team perps do not want on their case. Still, even then..."

"He can be brutally honest, Hermione. Crudely so. Took me a while to see that most of his post-war vitriol was honesty unleashed. After the 'Lavender Incident' he told me to steer clear of the two youngest Weasels. Foolishly I did not. Should have seen the outcome."

"Ginny made me make Ron my Best Man at her - and I mean her wedding. My first choice was Neville. He was and is my best mate by then. No. She wanted family. She hoped I would see the light. Bloody disaster. Had to put up with Malfoy's 'I told you so' for months. Ron made an ass of himself at the Rehearsal Dinner. There was Ginny, crying her ass off 'cause her brother and my Best Man was such a scandal and all I could do was say that I told her so. Not a good way to start a marriage. Then, just months later, I had to fire him for compromising a sensitive operation. Ron was a lousy Auror."

"You fired him?"

"I wrote him up. He was shagging the daughter of our mark - a Death Eater who had evaded us for almost two years. Ron brags to his shags. She tipped Daddy Deadly off and he was gone just as we set up to take him down. Ron was given a choice: resign or be prosecuted. He at least did the honorable thing and took the hint. He had a family to feed, after all."

"What?"

"Ron works with his brother George now. He married Lavender a few weeks after you left..."

"HE WHAT?"

"Had to, it seems. She gave birth to their first kid less than five months later. Seems he'd been shagging her since just after you went back to school. Seems she's also never heard of the concept of birth control. Last I heard, they had four kids and another on the way."

"I don't believe it," Hermione started.

WEDNESDAY - JULY 7, 1999 - AUROR SECTION, DEPARTMENT OF MAGICAL LAW ENFORCEMENT, MINISTRY FOR MAGIC, LONDON, U.K.

"I'm in deep shit, Harry," Ron said at lunch.

"I'll say."

"No, not just with Hermione. Although if - when she finds out I'll be in deeper shit with her."

"Oh?"

"Lavender's pregnant."

"What?"

"She's got MY bun in HER oven, Harry. And she intends to have it!"

"When?"

"Says she's due in December. What the hell am I going to do, Harry?"

"Told you."

"I know. Women are bloody mental."

"Maybe you should look in the mirror."

"What's than supposed to mean?"

Harry shrugged.

"She insists I do right by her," Ron moped.

"Meaning?"

"Marry her! I can't. Hermione..."

"Doesn't want you, remember?"

"She'll come around. She always does."

"I don't think she'll change her mind about you this time. This was one hurt she won't get over and one transgression she'll never forgive."

"Mental."

"Human."

WEDNESDAY - JULY 7, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Hermione had little to do that day. She had purchased her plane ticket to Australia and had spent a few days getting ready. She had seen Bill Weasley about her finances. It turned out the award she had received from the government was worth far more than she had imagined. If she lived frugally, she could live a modest yet comfortable - if boring - life without ever needing a job. Two Million Pounds at four percent per year was a lot of money by anyone's standards.

She had purchased a one way ticket to Australia. It was a practical decision she had made way back when she had sent her parents into involuntary exile during the War. She had erased their memories. Robert and Rose Granger, parents of one Hermione Granger, partners in a successful dental practice in Loughton, Essex - a suburb of London - now believed they were Wendell and Monica Wilkens, dentists married to one another who had no children and certainly never had a daughter. They also had always dreamed of living in Australia. Hermione used her magic - for she was a bona fide witch - to alter their reality to save them from the War that was

ravaging her world. She knew how powerful the charm she used was and knew she had no idea how long it might take to find them.

She was worried, though. They had resisted going overseas. She had to use her magic on them in the end. They might not be happy about that when she found them - if she found them. She thought she had done a good job two years ago, but over those two years she had learned that while she was smart, she was not perfect. She prayed that when the spell was lifted, they would forgive her.

What if they didn't? What if they hated her? She did not know if she could deal with that - especially now.

What if they did, but did not want to return home? Could she leave them again? If her family was not in Britain, what reason was there for her to return now that Ron was out of her life? Harry? He was a dear friend. He was more than that. He was everything to her. But was that enough? Was it enough if she was not everything to him? She had been receiving mixed signals for days now. She loved Harry as a friend, but now knew she could not come home to Britain just to remain his friend. Unless he gives me a better reason - as in ... - maybe I should consider staying away from this place, she thought. By place, she meant Britain - and Harry, although it broke her heart yet again to consider leaving her friend.

We need time, she thought. Part of her disagreed. She did not, but until he did not, what was the point? Still, why had the last couple of weeks almost been so happy for her? She should be miserable. Why wasn't she? She liked to think he had been waiting on her hand and foot, but that was not entirely true. He made dinner and after they would talk or just sit in the Living Room and read or watch the telly. There were a few days when he and Neville were partnered for a surveillance operation - he told her the basics, but not the specifics. He still managed to come home in the evenings and cook her a meal - and another portion he would then take to Neville. He would keep Neville's portion warm while he spent a couple of hours keeping her company. Damn, she thought! Ron hated my cooking - so did Harry, but he was gracious about it - yet he can cook and is not looking to ... damn!

Why did I ever get involved with that toerag, she thought? He was a friend, true enough. But I should have seen it. He never took me seriously. He never really listened to me about anything - unless I

was complimenting him about something. He was fun to be around, at least until he said something stupid - which was often. I should have known! Why did I let myself fall for that selfish, insecure, immature git? You know why! You were afraid to follow your heart. You were afraid to fall for Harry. Why? We always got along! Because you had no idea if he saw you as more than just a friend. Sometimes, it seemed that he did, sometimes not. Mixed signals. Better to have Harry as a friend than to ruin it by trying to push the relationship in a direction only one of us wants, she tried to convince herself.

If Harry was sending her mixed signals, Hermione herself was so confused. She was confused by her own feelings. She had usually been able to master them - control them since she was a little girl. It was her defense mechanism that had saved her from loneliness and despair on countless occasions as a child. Until she was almost twelve, until she met Harry, she had never had any real friends - not one. There were a few kids she knew in school who were nice to her on occasion, but she was always alone. She remembered her eighth birthday. It fell on a Saturday and her Mum offered to throw her a party so she could invite her friends. How could she tell her Mum she didn't have any friends? She couldn't. Her Mum seemed so eager. So she invited some classmates from her primary school - the ones who were not mean to her. She was not surprised when none of them came. She should have been heartbroken, but she was not. Her mother was. Her mother could not understand why Hermione was not upset by the obvious snub.

Harry had ruined her nice, safe walls. Chip by chip, over the years, at least for him, her emotional castle fell. It began when he was genuinely nice to her practically from her first day at Hogwarts. Everyone else seemed to ignore her, but Harry did not. Then again, Harry was nice to everyone in their dorm. He was the only one who remembered she was missing the night a Troll had been set loose in the school. He had dragged Ron with him to find her. She had only recently learned that Ron had no interest in finding her that day. Seconds from certain death, Harry and Ron came to her rescue. How could a girl not admire her knights in shining armor? Why did she fall for the wrong one?

Somehow, Harry had learned when her birthday was. Hermione never recalled telling him. After her eighth birthday fiasco, she could care less about anyone aside from her parents remembering.

September 19, 1992, she turned thirteen. Ironically, she now thought, it was another Saturday. He had asked her to meet him in an empty classroom that afternoon. She came. She wondered what Harry was on about. She walked in and only Harry was there.

SATURDAY - SEPTEMBER 19, 1992 - HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDY.

Hermione walked into the class room and saw her friend Harry standing there.

"I thought you were supposed to be at practice," she said with a hint of accusation in her voice.

"Wood's working Chaser Drills today. No need for a Seeker. Besides, there are more important things than Quidditch."

"Hmph," Hermione huffed. She happened to agree with that statement. "Well, you'd never know that around here!"

"It's true," Harry said with a smile. "Look at Ron, for example."

"It's all he ever talks about," Hermione groaned.

"Think about it, 'Mione. What is more important to Ron than Quidditch?"

Hermione thought long and hard about that one. "I give up," she confessed.

"Do you think for one minute he would skip a meal to see a Quidditch Match," Harry chortled?

Hermione actually laughed. Harry had hit on Ron's true passion - stuffing his face. "Okay," she confessed, "you got me there. But what about you, Harry? What's more important to you?"

"My friends," Harry said. He paused and then added, "and their birthdays."

Hermione was left speechless and watched as a set of curtains were pulled back.

"SURPRISE," several voices called out at once. Hermione was speechless. Standing before her were every member of her class in Gryffindor House, her Dorm: Harry, Ron, Dean Thomas, Neville Longbottom, Seamus Finnegan, Parvati Patil, Lavender Brown and Sally Ann Perks. Also there were Ron's older brothers Fred and George - which could only mean trouble, she thought - Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson and Katie Bell - all were a year or two ahead of her in school and Ginny Weasley, who was a year behind. Hagrid was there as well.

"Happy Birthday, Hermione," Harry said.

There was a table laden with food and a huge cake. There were also presents. Hermione could not help herself. She hugged Harry and cried tears of joy.

Most of her gifts were simple and edible. She had enough candy to give her parents - who were dentists and had never allowed her sweets - a fit. Harry, however, had bought her books. Not magical books as she expected, but works of literature. It turned out that once the Weasley Twins had liberated Harry from his Aunt and Uncle's place, he had sent her parents a letter and asked them about her birthday and what she might want for a present. They had never said anything to her about it.

CHAPTER THREE

WEDNESDAY - JULY 7, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Her thirteenth birthday had been the best day of her life up to that point, she thought. It was the day she realized she had friends and was not alone in the world. It was the day she realized she had a life before her. She smiled remembering that day and remembering how she had learned that Harry had made that day possible. She looked at the watch she wore. It was a birthday present from Harry that he gave her on her sixteenth birthday. She had the inscription that had been engraved on the gold back committed to memory: "9/19/95 To Hermione on her Sweet 16. Friends Forever. Harry." She would never wear another watch again, she thought.

Why was it, she thought, why was it that most all of the truly happy moments in her life involved Harry? Ron never made her as happy as Harry had. Why? Why the mixed signals from Harry? Why did that bother her? Why? She had been staying at Harry's for almost two weeks. This or similar thoughts had begun haunting her first at night and then during the day the day after she recovered from the first hangover of her life. Slowly, she had begun to ask herself whether she was falling in love with Harry. She was certain she was not, but now began to think that the reason she was not falling in love is that she was already in love and had been for some time.

This realization - one she was not willing to share just yet, not with the mixed signals she was getting - caused her to try and understand what really had happened between her and Ron. Did she get involved with Ron because she was afraid Harry did not have similar feelings for her? Did she get involved with Ron because she knew losing Ron would not hurt nearly as much as losing Harry? Did she do it because it was better to have Harry as her best friend than not at all?

Another thought began creeping into her mind. Could she come back to Britain? She was leaving to find her parents. What would happen after? What if her parents did not want to come home? It was a possibility. Australia was supposed to be a nice place. They may have a life there they do not wish to leave. And what if they did not want to leave? Was there really anything to come home to?

Could she come home if all she had to look forward to was having Harry as a friend?

She wondered if Harry had similar feelings for her. Did he, or was her relationship with him a pathetic, unrequited love? If that's all it was, she was sorely tempted never to return home - not for him. She would miss him and their friendship desperately, she knew that. She would probably miss him for the rest of her life. But she would not miss him finding his love match with someone else. The whole situation was maddening. She wanted to be angry about it, but she could not. If only he would give her some clear, unequivocal sign, one way or another. What were his feelings towards her? Was he even thinking about that?

What Hermione did not know is that is exactly what Harry was thinking about. He had little else to do, really. He was alone in his two seat roadster that he had purchased right after he passed his driver's examination last fall. His reflection had begun practically when he drove out of Oxford heading home to London. He had business in Oxford that day and, partly because the weather was nice and partly because he liked his little green car, he decided to drive. He remembered what happened the Monday after Hermione moved in as he gave her the Grand Tour of his renovated home...

MONDAY - JUNE 28, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, UK

"But Harry," Hermione protested, "I've already seen the renovations! You showed us before Ginny and I returned to school!"

"Ah," Harry laughed, "I showed you the remodeling. But it wasn't until after the Christmas Holidays that I had time to complete the renovation process."

"What are you talking about?"

"Perhaps you failed to notice?"

"What?"

"I guess being dead drunk or hung over for a couple of days impairs even your exceptional observational skills," Harry laughed.

"Harry," she growled back, "will you stop teasing me and get to the point!"

"Look," Harry pointed towards the floor.

Hermione's eyes followed and saw what Harry was pointing at. "An electrical outlet, so," she said. Then she caught on. "But, this place didn't have electricity!"

"Exactly," Harry smiled.

"I should have noticed," Hermione gasped! "I mean, I turned the lights on in the bathroom and thought nothing of it! But Harry, how - how can it work? Everyone knows magic mucks with electricity."

"Do they now? Did your parents electricity get all mucked up whenever you returned from school? Did your telly go on the blink when you were at home?"

"No, but I wasn't using magic so..."

"How about when you did? You must have had accidental outbursts as a young girl. Did the lights flicker or anything?"

"No - not that I recall."

"Exactly."

"What's your point, Harry?"

"It's a myth, Hermione, or at least a gross exaggeration of the truth."

"What is?"

"Magic has no effect on electricity whatsoever, Hermione. It can effect electronics, but only if there's a lot of it around."

"But the books," Hermione began to protest.

"Were written by 'purebloods' who feared technology, Hermione. People fear what they don't understand, don't they?"

Hermione nodded.

"Throw in the pureblood prejudice and the fear becomes near hysteria. The purebloods feared that if our world embraced technology, their children would embrace Muggles - would marry Muggles - would prefer Muggles as potential mates to the pureblooded alternative. Long ago they created a myth about technology. They tried to convince the whole wizarding world that it was evil, backward, sub-human and incompatible with magic. In Europe, backed by so called scholarly works, they were successful. Only in Europe."

"What? But Harry? All the books..."

"Consider the source, Hermione! History of Magic, written by a pureblood, right? Aside from witch burnings and such, does it ever mention the non-magical world? It's all about goblins, dragons, trolls, giants and dark wizards, isn't it? Nothing about real history. Well over ninety-nine percent of the human race does not exist if you take that book at face value. Most of the great accomplishments of humanity never happened if you base your perception of the world on the wizarding view - both the good and the bad. Do you think for one minute a cretin like Riddle could have been successful if our world knew and appreciated the evil of Hitler or Stalin? Most would have seen the enemy for what they were. The Ministry would have acted. Those who are ignorant of history, are doomed to repeat it, Hermione."

"But what about the Hogwarts Express, Harry?" Hermione replied. She liked a good debate, but feared that most of what she had learned about the magical world might be false. "What about the Knight's Bus, the cars the Ministry uses; they are real, aren't they? They are technological!"

"Real yes," Harry replied. "They are physical. But they are as technological as your wand, Hermione. They don't work."

"But they move, they must work!"

"They don't. They don't run on petrol or coal. They can't. They run because they are enchanted, Hermione. They run on magic, not on the physics and engineering that makes the real things run. They are fakes - crude imitations of the real thing."

"Then why - but isn't enchanting a Muggle object illegal?"

"That law's a bloody joke, 'Mione. A broom is technically a Muggle object. The Ministry decides when to enforce that silly law and when to look the other way. Truth is, the only part of that law that is enforced with some degree of uniformity is the section about passing enchanted objects on to a Muggle."

"Harry, but surely there are some who don't have an issue with Muggles?"

"Aside from those raised by one or more non-magical parents, name me one."

"Dumbledore!"

"You know as well as I do at my age he thought so highly of his non-magical kin that he felt wizards should rule over them."

"He grew out of that."

"The megalomania? Certainly. His idea of 'The Greater Good' did change. But did he ever try and assimilate into the non-magical world? What I saw of him was he patronizing to anyone he felt was not his equal - which was everyone, myself included. He looked upon the vast majority of humanity with pity - and if that is not a sign of a feeling of superiority, I don't know what is. He never once gave me the impression he either knew or respected anyone or anything that happened outside of his insular magical world."

"Arthur Weasley then." What had set Harry off, Hermione wondered?

"Ah yes. The Blood Traitor himself. Self-professed Muggle Lover. Been in Muggle Affairs for almost thirty years, hasn't he? Considers Muggles fascinating, doesn't he? He collects bloody plugs, Hermione! He doesn't even know what they do! Almost thirty years of work experience, and Outstanding N.E.W.T. in Muggle Studies and he doesn't even know the language! Pleasemen! Pumblers! Eceltricity! Fellytone! If he was so bloody sincere, he would learn about them. If he was so bloody sincere, he would try and live as one at least to some extent!"

"Molly would kill him."

"And there is the point. The entire bloody point of our society is to be totally and completely isolated from the non-magical world. The so called experts study the rest of humanity the way a zoologist studies a wild animal."

"But Harry, the Statute of Secrecy requires that..."

"Have you ever actually read the Statute?"

"I - erm - well, I have read the Wizengamot's Enabling Act of 1692."

"I'm sure you have. It was, after all, the first few pages of the History of Magic and was in Hogwarts: A History. But have you ever actually seen the Statute of Secrecy itself?"

"Um..."

"You haven't. It's not in print anywhere in any book you could possibly have read. It's not. The Statute of Secrecy itself is secret. The only copies in all of Britain are in the Archives in the Department of Mysteries."

"You have seen it, I take it?" Hermione asked incredulously.

"I have."

"And?"

"If the average witch or wizard knew what it said, the last War might never have happened. The Statute was a document of what would become the Enlightenment, perverted by the Pureblood Movement in this country that existed at that time and has continued to the present day. The real Statute is not what we were told it was. Compared to the Enabling Act and the various other secrecy statutes it's short and sweet. Want to hear it?"

"Sure," Hermione said skeptically.

Harry nodded as he walked to a nearby bookcase and pulled out a book. It was then that Hermione realized his house was full of books.

She had taken books for granted, but seeing he actually had a library surprised her. He turned to her and read:

"Before the International Confederation of Warlocks Herein Assembled By Consent In Antwerp In the Year of Our Lord Sixteen Hundred and Eighty-Nine:

WHEREAS: It being the Nine Hundred and Ninety-First Anniversary of the Council of Milan wherein Magical and Non-magical Leaders failed to reach an accord;

WHEREAS: Since such Council, the non-magical rulers, both ecclesiastic and secular have used magic as an excuse to launch programs of persecution to consolidate or justify their rule over their subjects;

WHEREAS: Religious Zealots have falsely accused our magical kind of a host of crimes, few of which ever occurred and fewer still were truly magical in nature;

WHEREAS: From time to time through the Centuries, the Rulers and Fearful have launched slanderous campaigns against us, killing untold tens of thousands of innocents in their zeal;

WHEREAS: Despite recent decrees from the Holy Mother Church declaring witch hunting heresy, the Zealous still seek to do us harm;

WHEREAS: Recent developments in technology - most notably firearms - have rendered magical defenses practically useless;

WHEREAS: Should some despot come to power who seeks our annihilation, we are now rendered impotent to prevent it as our kind cannot survive an assault from their armies;

WHEREAS: Since the dawn of time, it has been the sacred mission of our kind to protect and defend all mankind;

WHEREAS: Since the dawn of time, our kind has recognized the right of all mankind to rule themselves as they see fit;

IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that in order to fulfill our most sacred trust, we must and shall disappear from this World FOREVER.

THEREFORE:

It shall be unlawful for any witch or wizard to reveal their nature to any person, however low or mighty, lest it be known to said witch or wizard that such person is magical themselves unless such person is the parent, husband, wife, brother, sister, son or daughter of aforesaid witch or wizard, or such others deemed trustworthy in the eyes of each signatory.

It shall be unlawful for any witch or wizard to use any spell, potion or any other magical craft on, or allow any spell, potion or magical craft to be used upon any non-magical human except to prevent grievous bodily harm or violent death.

Each of the Signatories hereto shall enact such laws as they deem appropriate to carry out the spirit of this CHARTER. Such laws shall criminalize and impose HARSH punishments upon those who risk violation of this CHARTER. Such laws shall safeguard our magical world from discovery and detection and shall, insofar as necessary, provide for the regulation and control of all life with known and powerful magical properties. Such laws may authorize duly appointed agents of each of the signatories to use memory or other non-violent charms to prevent the dissemination of information of our world in event of any breach of this CHARTER.

Each of the Signatories is encouraged to enact such laws and post such incentives as they deem appropriate to encourage full integration of our kind in the greater world to include, without limitation: ending the practice of separate communities, economies and education; ending all prohibitions of marriage or impairment of property rights based upon magical status; prohibiting all magic where non-magical options are reasonably available; ending any and all practices that might be deemed as promoting any degree of enmity between our kind and the rest of humanity - of whom we are a part; and prohibiting arranged marriages based solely upon magical lineage."

"I thought you said the only copy was in the Department of Mysteries," Hermione said.

Harry nodded.

"Then how..."

Harry handed Hermione his book. She read the title: Magical Perspectives On Western Civilization: Exploration, Empire and Enlightenment, 1487 - 1815.

"What's this?" she asked.

"One of the standard Fifth Year Texts from the American Magical Education Board. They study history - magical and non-magical all through school there. They also take courses in non-magical studies. It's a separate curriculum there. They begin magical education at age six, not eleven. In addition to magic, they also take math, science, English and Literature and other non-magical courses. I have found their approach to everything very enlightening."

"So why haven't I seen this book?"

"Legally, this book is banned in Britain," Harry said calmly. "Although it is not a crime for me to have it, for me to reproduce it, sell it, give it away or even show it to someone is a crime."

"Hold over from the War, I assume," Hermione started. The notion of banning books really riled her.

"No. The law in question was passed in 1692. All reproductions of the actual Statute of Secrecy were banned in Britain. That law, of course, allowed banning of other books deemed subversive - as in not promoting the notion of Pureblood supremacy. For therein lay the problem. The Pureblood movement, while not nor never unique to Britain, is and always was strongest here. The Statute was deemed a direct attack on the very basis of our magical government - Bloodlines."

"You mean Purebloods?" Hermione asked.

"Who becomes a member of the Wizengamot?" Harry asked back.

"The brightest and wisest witches and wizards of the day - with some seats for key members of the Ministry - such as the Minister himself."

"Textbook answer. Pity it's a lie."

"A lie?"

"Tell me, Hermione, why are you not on the Wizengamot?"

"I'm too young obviously."

"Then why are Neville and I on the Wizengamot?"

"Y-you are?" she asked in shock.

"You have to admit you are brighter - and certainly wiser, or at least more mature than either of us. Yet we have seats and you don't. Why?"

"Purebloods?"

"You know that's not true. My father married a Muggleborn. I am technically a Half Blood. You're a Half Blood if one set of grandparents were not magical. But legally, yes. The Wizengamot is like the House of Lords. You are born into it. When it was established in 832, it consisted of the Heads of the 600 Houses: 600 clans, as it were, of wizarding communities. Their heads formed the first Chamber - the first Wizengamot that ruled a united Magical Britain. The seat passed down the family line, from oldest child to oldest child. But, your family would lose its seat if the heir married a Muggle. Muggleborns were still magical and, while reviled, it was not such an insult as to disenfranchise the family. The Potters have a host of Muggleborn ancestors, but kept their seats. The 'Blood Traitor' was a Wizengamot line that married a Muggle. They were expelled from the Chamber. The Weasleys were one such family."

"That's horrible!"

Harry nodded in agreement.

"But, what if the heir had a younger sibling who did not marry a Muggle?"

"The fact that the heir did, disenfranchised the entire line."

"That's just..."

"Insane," Harry agreed. "The Malfoy's, for example."

"What about them?"

"All bragging about their 'Pureblood' status?"

"Yeah, so?" Hermione replied with venom. She loathed them.

"Yet, they have no seat on the Wizengamot, even though they are descended from the 600 - by marriage. The Malfoy's came over during the Norman Conquest, unlike us Potters and Longbottoms."

"So?"

"So, one of their heirs married a Muggle and disenfranchised the family. They've been trying to make up for it ever since."

"You're kidding!"

Harry shook his head.

"This is insane!"

Harry nodded in agreement. "There is a part of me," he confessed, "that wants to pack it all in and leave Europe forever. The rest of magical Europe is not much better, by the way."

"Where would you go?"

"America, Australia, Canada or New Zealand."

"Why?"

"For one reason, because they speak English. For another, they have it right or at least far more right than we do. The final Clause of the Statute of Secrecy encouraged certain laws. We never passed them. They did. They are integrated into the general population. They don't use magic simply because they can and they don't hide from the world. They hide their magic, to be sure, but not themselves. Did you know the Americans actually had a show on the telly about a witch who married a Muggle? It was based upon a true story, although they did it as a comedy to 'hide' the truth of it. It was hugely popular at the time."

"How do you know this?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"To quote Ron, I have been corrupted by evil and foreign influences."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what happened to the Auror Corps."

Hermione did indeed. Before the War, there had been seventy-five Aurors, those tasked with dealing with dark wizards and witches and dark magic. At any given time fifty were on foreign assignment of one kind or another and the others were in Britain. When Harry killed Voldemort - the most terrifying dark wizard of the age - and effectively won a war that had been lost, the Auror Corps was down to seven within days. Most had been killed in the war. Others had joined the enemy and were now in prison for sentences ranging from ten years to life, depending upon their crimes. Others fled and made it clear they would never return. Harry, Ron and Neville became Aurors within days, despite never taking the exams or going through the normal three year training. Hermione became one as well, but she gave it up once the foreigners arrived to complete her formal education.

The Ministry had no choice. Despite Voldemort's defeat, scores of his followers either were not at or escaped what the press called 'The Final Battle.' It was final for Voldemort, but not final for the War. Hermione would fight in three more before she returned to school, all were at least as desperate. She thanked God every day that none were anywhere near as costly.

To fill the gap, the Acting Minister for Magic - himself and Auror - asked for and received assistance from foreign sources. The current Auror Corps was British in name only, she knew. The bulk of its trained agents were on 'loan' from the American F.B.I. (Magical Section), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Magical), and the Magical Australian National Police. She knew Harry had been assigned to a Roger Malone from the American F.B.I. and had been sent to America for three months training the previous year.

"So what does knowing foreigners have to do with anything?" Hermione asked.

"Through them, I have learned the errors in our ways here," Harry said. "There are many. They all arise from baseless bigotry and the desire of a few to perpetuate an antiquated and counterproductive hereditary aristocracy. The whole system, the whole culture here in Britain is geared to preserve a falsehood. Our English speaking cousins left these shores for that reason and have been at best highly critical of us ever since. Do you realize that when magical folk visit from those countries, they travel as Muggles? They do not want to be sullied with our backwards society. They look upon us with disdain as a culture."

"Why?"

"Our cultural distrust if not fear of humanity," Harry said. "In those countries, they live mostly as Muggles do here. True, they teach and learn magic, but they are far more open about it. Tell me, Hermione, and be honest, how were things between you and your parents before you sent them away?"

Hermione thought for a long while before cautiously saying: "Strained."

"I take it they were not that way before they learned of your magical nature?"

"No. I mean they were concerned about things. They were upset that I didn't really have any friends. Other than that, no. They were very loving and supportive."

"You were spending less and less time with them as the years went on," Harry noted.

"Well, there was so much going on and..." Hermione began.

"It probably would have happened anyway. Our culture is designed to remove the magical child from the non-magical world and their non-magical families forever. That's why we did not learn of our nature until about a month before school started. That's why your parents only additional education about our world could only come from you. That's why the Statute of Secrecy and the laws regarding underage wizardry were pounded into our heads at school - so that those of us from the Muggle world would keep silent. And that's also

why you and your parents drifted apart. They did not understand you anymore, did they?"

Hermione nodded afraid to speak for fear of breaking down.

"In America, your parents would have been approached not long after you were born. They would have been assigned a Mentor to educate them and help them adjust to and deal with the challenges that lay ahead and to teach them all about our world. They would have been encouraged to take an active part in your magical education. While there are always a few who cannot deal with the knowledge, most do. Heck, their Magical Secretary of Education whose Department is in charge of all Magical Education in that country is the non-magical mother of magical children.

"As I said, if I thought I could get away with it, I would move to America tomorrow. But I can't."

"Why not?"

"Too bloody famous, really. I am known over there and I would be pestered with fans as well as investigative reporters from here. There's no escape for me, it seems."

"So, what are you going to do?"

"If I can't bring myself to a society I want to live in, then I must try and help remake this society. Small steps at first, I admit. 'Going Native' as Ron so eloquently calls it is but one such step. I take the Tube into work. I have a car - a real car. I only use magical transport when there is no non-magical alternative - and only in the line of duty. Drives Ginny nuts, it does. It's a five hour drive from here to her parents' place, you know. Then again she likes the car far more than my motorcycle."

"Wait a minute," Hermione said, "you have a car? A Motorcycle?"

Harry nodded.

"Do they fly or something?" Hermione asked.

"Nope. And you'd be surprised at how often I get that question from magical types. Want to see them?"

She nodded.

"Right then! They're kept out back in the Carriage House."

For once, she kept her curiosity to herself. Hermione's brain had gone into overdrive. She was afraid to ask about Harry's rant. She sensed, however, that he was serious. Voldemort was not the problem in their world, he was but a very annoying symptom. Moreover, she thought, Harry was right. When did he get to be so smart? He was always smart, she reminded herself, he just never applied himself in class. Well, that wasn't true either, was it. He was ranked seventh in their class. She had checked - being Head Girl this past year had advantages. Harry had just missed and Outstanding O.W.L. in Potions. She should have known that the book he used their sixth year was not the only reason he had done so well. Ron, on the other hand...well at least he was barely in the upper half of their class. But the Harry she now saw was still Harry, but something had changed.

When did he grow up? Harry was almost a year younger than she was. Harry had always been the more mature of her friends, including Ron, but that never seemed to be saying much - until now. He seemed older - wiser in a way. The War, she thought. Clearly that was part of the reason. But the ideas he had expressed and the language he had used? That was different. He never seemed as eloquent before. Had she missed something? Bother, she thought, I missed a year going back to school! I missed...

She had not realized it, but as she followed Harry out the back door to his house lost in her own thoughts, she had missed noticing his large garden or his description of the Carriage House. She came back to reality standing on the Ground Floor of the Carriage House looking at a large, yellow motorcycle. She had seen it before.

"It that," she began, "is that Sirius's motorcycle?"

Harry nodded.

"I thought it was destroyed when we were attacked a couple of years ago," she said.

"Arthur Wealsey took it to a mechanic in Ottery St. Catchpole while we were off hunting horcruxes. Took a while, but the bike was rebuilt."

"That was nice of him," Hermione said.

Harry laughed. "I guess it's the thought that counts, really."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when it was fixed, Arthur didn't realize the mechanic expected to be paid in coin of the realm, as it were. Fortunately, that was after the war so I was able to pay for the repairs - it cost over ten thousand."

"Pounds?" Hermione asked in shock.

Harry nodded. "I could have bought a bike just like it for less."

Hermione then saw Harry's car. It was a small, dark green, two seat convertible with tan leather seats. It looked awfully impractical and expensive.

"What a cute little car," she said as cheerfully as she could be.

"Cute little car," Harry mumbled, clearly insulted.

"What did I say?" Hermione asked.

"This," Harry replied, "is an Aston Martin DB7. It's one of the finest motor cars ever made. You ever see the James Bond movies?"

"No," Hermione said.

"Well, James Bond is a fictional British Secret Agent who takes on megalomaniacs bent on world domination - not unlike someone you might know," Harry laughed, "and he usually drove an Aston Martin. So, I figured if it's good enough for James Bond, it's good enough for Harry Potter," he laughed again.

"Is it expensive?"

"'Bout seventy thousand Quidd," Harry admitted.

"Harry," Hermione shot in an accusing tone! "How much money have you spent? It doesn't grow on trees, you know! An expensive sports car you don't really need! Are you mad?"

Harry laughed.

"What's so funny? What are you going to do if you go broke?"

"What's funny is most people think I'm mental for even buying a car. The Wealseys have no idea how expensive it was, they just think I've gone off the deep end."

"You have! Your spending money like there's no bottom to your vault. That's insane, Harry!"

"Ah," Harry exclaimed smugly, "but you are mistaken, Hermione."

"How so?"

"I am exceedingly wealthy. The rich are not insane - they are eccentric."

Hermione stared at him in disbelief.

"In the year since the War ended, I've probably spent close to three hundred thousand on the car, renovations to the house, furnishings, and other conveniences."

"THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND?"

"And," Harry continued unfazed, "in the same time, I've earned far more than ten times that in investments and interest."

Hermione's jaw dropped.

"Seems I inherited far more than I had thought," Harry laughed. "The Potters were quite wealthy and the inheritance from my Godfather was hardly a pittance."

"Who knows about this?" Hermione asked.

"Not many," Harry admitted. "Aside from Bill Weasley, no one knows the full extent of my finances. Ginny has an idea. She's been on me for months about it. She can't understand why I would want to work when it's clear I don't need the money."

Hermione merely nodded.

"Money won't change the world," Harry continued, "it takes people to do that, although having a large bankroll certainly helps. Now, if you can lay off about the money, I promise to take you on a nice drive out in the country this weekend. Deal?"

She could only nod in reply.

WEDNESDAY - JULY 7, 1999 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Hermione sat upon the couch thinking about the last week. The mixed signals from Harry could not detract from the fact that this had been one of the best weeks of her life. True, it began horribly. It began with her catching her fiancé shagging another woman. It began with her decision following such betrayal to dump him forever. She should have been miserable, but she was not. Harry had been a true friend. He had gone out of his way to make her feel special.

During the week Harry still had to go into work. Last week Hermione had been busy herself getting ready for her next adventure - finding her parents. She had shopping to do, her finances to arrange and sort out, her passport to update, flight reservations and such to make. Her errands took her into central London near where Harry worked so he offered to take her to lunch each day. He took her to non-magical restaurants, all of them were really nice and each featured a different cuisine: Italian, Indian, Japanese, American or as Harry had been told, Southern cuisine, a barbeque place he had really liked. Harry cooked dinner for her most nights. She had to admit, if Harry ever gave up being an Auror, he probably had a future as a chef. His meals were amazing.

The past weekend had almost been perfect. His drive through the country was wonderful. The weather had been lovely, so Harry kept the top down. He did not tell her where they were going and all she knew was they were heading north and west. Finally, after almost

four hours they drove into a village Hermione recognized: Godric's Hollow. Harry explained he was having his parent's house rebuilt. It had been destroyed in the war and left as a monument. Harry was planning on using it as a vacation home or a place for a weekend getaway. He showed her around as he spoke with the contractor. He asked for her opinion on things, which surprised her. She was even more surprised that he listened to her advice.

He then took Hermione to the local Pub which he said was worth the trip itself, best fish and chips in England, he said. Harry was well known in his "home town" but not a celebrity Hermione was pleased to see. The villagers, magical and non-magical all treated him like a local, updating him on the town gossip, playing a round of darts, speculating about the upcoming football season and whether England would win the next Test. He was grilled about his new girlfriend and Hermione was practically interrogated by the women of the village. It was a little uncomfortable, as she did not really see herself as Harry's girlfriend, but upon reflection it had been a wonderful time.

On Sunday, Harry had taken her shopping, dining and to a movie. Actually, they saw two movies as they could not agree on one so Harry suggested she pick one, he'd pick another. It had been almost perfect. Almost. He never tried anything really, she reflected. He'd hold her hand, but he never tried to kiss her. Mixed signals.

Today, she had nothing to do really. She had not met Harry for lunch earlier as he was in Cambridge on business. Harry had taken his car and had told her he should be back between five and six. It was a little after four in the afternoon and she was at Harry's trying to read a book, but her thoughts kept her from reading at all. The doorbell rang and absently she stood up and went to answer it.

It was when she opened the door and saw who had come calling that she realized she had made a big mistake. Before her stood the last person on earth she ever wanted to see and he was not alone. Ron Weasley looked at her with an odd expression on his face and his mother was expressionless. Hermione folded her arms across her chest and glared at him.

"Well," she said, "what do you want?" She made no effort to hide the hostility she felt.

"Is Harry here?" Ron asked. He was obvious in avoiding the real answer.

"Unlike you," Hermione practically growled, "Harry takes his work seriously. He's at work, of course."

"Oh," Ron replied softly, "well good, I guess. I came to see you, you know." Hermione did not reply, she just glared. "Tried to see you yesterday and the day before but neither you nor Harry were here. Where were you?"

"None of your damn business, Weasley," Hermione shot back. "And, I thought Harry made it clear to you that I never want to see you again!"

"I thought he was kidding," Ron started.

"You really are thick, aren't you," Hermione yelled back! "What possible reason would I have to see you? You made it quite clear where I stand last Saturday and I don't want to be any part of your pathetic life!"

"Hermione we're engaged," Ron began.

"Were engaged! That's over. FOREVER!"

"Hermione," Ron's mother interjected. Hermione had forgotten she was there and now wondered why she was there. Ron lacked the courage to see her alone, most likely. "I'm sure that whatever happened, you two will forgive each other and be able to make up and move past this as a couple."

"Obviously he didn't tell you what happened," Hermione hissed. "Bloody coward," she added. "Let me ask you this, Molly. Would you have forgiven Arthur if you came home and found him shagging another woman in your front parlor?"

"What," Molly shrieked, "what are you talking about?"

"When I came home from school, I walked in and found this cretin here having sex with another woman! You want me to forgive? Not going to happen!"

"Hermione," Ron pleaded. "I love you! She meant nothing to me! She was just..."

"Save it," Hermione shot back. "I suppose none of the others meant anything to you at all either." She was taking a shot in the dark. She had no real reason to suspect there were others, but he seemed so bereft of remorse or a conscious about what he had done, she was almost certain Lavender was not his only affair.

"They didn't," he began before realizing the gravity of his admission.

"YOU BASTARD!" She could not help herself. She slapped him as hard as she can. "I never want to see you again, Weasley. I never want to hear from you again. I don't even want to hear rumors about you!"

"Don't you love me?" he replied in a small voice.

"NO! What's more, I'm not sure I ever really did! You are not the Ron Weasley I though I knew and I thought I loved. You are a selfish, immature, thick, unfaithful, disloyal, untrustworthy TRAITOR! I cannot love that! I'd sooner fall in love with Malfoy than a piece of filth like you!"

Ron was pale and speechless. "Maybe," Molly suggested, "maybe when you get back we can..."

"And what makes you think I'm coming back?"

"You're not?" Ron started.

"Why should I? Why Ronald? I sure as hell won't come back for you! I'm not sure if my parents will ever want to return here after all that happened and I don't blame them. The war is over, but nothing has changed and I don't want to live in this country with things the way they are. I can see NO reason for me to return!"

"But I need you," Ron said sounding desperate.

"Obviously a lie," Hermione said. "Looks to me like you need a shag more than a soul mate. I hope you have a nice life, but I doubt that will be your fate, Weasley."

"Hermione, I love you!"

"Rubbish!"

"It's true," he argued!

"Not only do I think you don't love me, I'm not even sure if you ever really liked me!"

"Hermione?"

"SHUT IT! FOR ONCE IN THE EIGHT YEARS WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER, LISTEN TO ME!"

He stared at her in silence as she took a breath.

"If Harry had not decided to be my friend First Year, would you have? Would you?"

"I..."

"No, you would not. You thought I was a mental, insufferable know-it-all! You made it clear I could never have any friends! Do you have ANY idea how much that hurt me? I cried in the bathroom for hours because ... because I never had a friend before and thought ... I thought you might be right. That was the day the Troll was let into our school, remember?"

"If Harry had not decided to try and find me, would you have? Would you? No, you would not - and don't say otherwise. You would not have risked your life on my account - you never did!"

"That's not true! What about Malfoy Manor! I..."

"Okay. Once! Once in eight years - and there had been plenty of other opportunities! The night I was petrified Second Year, I asked you to help me in the Library. You refused! You thought I was insane taking that risk with the monster at large.

"When things got a little uncomfortable during the War, you tried to convince me to abandon Harry! Don't deny it, YOU DID!"

"It was the horcrux," Ron protested!

"And you were the only git who lost the faith, Ronald! You left me! You left Harry! But you left me! HOW COULD YOU?"

"I thought we were passed this," Ron began.

"I should have known THEN! It was the third time you put yourself ahead of me and the third time you broke my heart and yet I was fool enough to take you back! I should have seen that all I was a trophy for you! I was a girl and all you saw me as was a fucking piece of meat - a potential conquest - something you might have that Harry might not! What a fool I was!"

"Hermione..."

"SHUT UP! Did you ever take my side? EVER? The few times Harry and I had a falling out, whose side were you on? It was never mine. NEVER! Harry admits that I was usually right, he was just upset that - well that I acted without telling him. I can understand why he was upset, but he always knew I was just trying to help. YOU NEVER UNDERSTOOD THAT! You always saw it as an act of betrayal!"

"The War ends and I want to go find my parents. Do you offer to help? Do you offer even the slightest bit of encouragement? No! You beg me to stay because there was so much to do. You begged me to stay to help hunt down the enemy that escaped. Harry didn't! He understood! Foolishly, I listened to you!"

"Then, I decide to go back to school and finish my final year. What do you do? You accuse me of being mental! You could not understand WHY I wanted to finish school! 'We don't need N.E.W.T.s,' you said! YOU NEVER UNDERSTOOD ME! YOU NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW IMPORTANT EDUCATION IS TO ME! YOU WERE JUST PISSED OFF THAT I WAS GOING AWAY AND TOO STUPID TO JOIN ME WHEN YOU COULD HAVE! IF YOU REALLY LOVED ME, YOU WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD! AND NOW I LEARN YOU SPENT YOUR TIME AWAY FROM ME SHAGGING ANY TART THAT WOULD PART HER KNEES FOR YOU! IF YOU TRULY LOVED ME, YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE DONE THAT! If you even liked me, you would have broken up with me rather than string me along while you dipped your wick in others!"

"You're shagging him aren't you?" Ron said in an accusing tone as Hermione tried to catch her breath.

"What?"

"You're shagging Harry, aren't you?"

"Don't be silly," Hermione said. "You're just jealous! As always! I meant it when I said I am waiting for my wedding night, Ronald. That rule applies to anyone and not just you! You're such an insecure, selfish GIT!"

"What about Harry?" Ron asked.

"What about him?"

"Well..."

"WHAT ABOUT HIM?"

"You're going to abandon him too..."

"He's not about to marry me, Weasley. I will not come back just to be his friend. That's not reason enough to come back to this cesspool and - and there is no other reason."

"Does he know?"

Hermione nodded.

"Surely he's trying to stop you...."

"Unlike you, he understands. He'd leave himself if he thought he could just disappear. Well, I can and I will."

"Hermione..."

"I'm not coming back!"

"But I want to marry you! I need to marry you!"

"I don't care!"

"Well I hope you die a dried up old spinster," Ron started.

"Better that than your wife! Anything is better than that! Goodbye, Ronald. Have a nice life!" She then slammed the door in his face. She returned to the couch and broke down in tears.

LATER THAT EVENING

"Hermione, what's wrong?" She heard Harry ask. She had no idea how long she had been crying. It seemed mostly over, there are after all only so many tears one can shed in one sitting, she thought, still the pain remained. She looked to the voice and saw a blurry Harry sitting next to her.

"What's wrong?" He asked again. She could hear the concern in his voice. She wiped her eyes and nose and sniffled a couple of times.

"Ron," she said softly. She saw Harry nod.

"He seems to be doing a lot of that lately," he commented cryptically.

"You did tell him I did not want to talk to him?" she said accusingly.

"More than once," Harry replied ignoring the accusation. "He insisted he needed to see you this morning, in fact. I told him I'd mention it to you but that for now the answer was still a big, fat 'No.' He seemed to understand. Why?"

"Well, he seems to ignore you as well is all."

"What do you mean?"

"He and his Mum showed up at the door this afternoon."

"THEY WHAT?"

She nodded. "I guess he thought I couldn't say no to him if his mother was around. He underestimated me as usual." She laughed a bit. "It was clear he hadn't told his Mum about his escapades," she added. "Love to be a fly on the wall when they got home! I mean, it might have been a short fling - but it was a fling none the less. Molly must be thrilled her son is shagging a werewolf..."

"Hermione, she liked Remus," Harry said.

"Yeah, well as I understand it, it's supposed to be different for women," Hermione said. "Although I've seen no proof, the general belief is that a child born to a mother werewolf is born a werewolf."

"How," Harry began.

"I visited her in Hospital after the Battle. It wasn't known if she was one, but everyone was certain she would be. Greyback had changed, you know. It was a full moon that night - though it rose late."

Harry nodded. "It's what got Remus killed," Harry added. "He started to transform and Dolohov killed him."

Hermione nodded. "Lavender was crushed. She was certain she could never have a family as what wizard - what man for that matter - would want a wife who would bear monsters from birth. I felt sorry for her then."

"She was cured, you know."

"Yeah. A muggle-born late blooming wizard with a background in Muggle medicine finds a cure before she ever transformed when the Pureblood bastards in the Ministry and St. Mungo's had spent centuries writing them off and declaring them dark creatures. The attitude is still there, Harry. I saw it at school last year. There were a few new students who had been Weres and most of the 'proper' wizards shunned them like lepers."

"Yet another reason I would love to be done with this place," Harry grumbled.

Hermione could only nod in agreement.

Harry nodded. "So what did Ron want?"

"Wanted me back, didn't he? He seemed bloody desperate, even for Ron. Seemed like he wanted me to ..."

"To?"

"I don't know, Harry. But it seemed that he wanted to marry me as soon as possible."

"No surprise there after what Lavender told him," Harry said absently. He was too busy evaluating this new information to notice what he was saying.

"What?" Hermione asked softly.

"Well, if he doesn't marry you soon, he'll probably have to marry her," Harry began, then shut up.

"WHAT?" Hermione shrieked.

Damn, Harry thought, think before opening your mouth. "Er..."

"HARRY!"

"Lavender's pregnant with Ron's child."

"THAT BASTARD!"

"It's not the kid's fault, Hermione," Harry said hoping to tone down the bad situation.

"I MEANT RON! So when is this love child due, or does the Git even care?"

"December, he says."

"Son of a bitch has been busy while I was at school hasn't he?" Hermione hissed. "I can do the math. She might have been knocked up before the Spring Holiday!"

"It's worse."

"What do you mean?"

"I've told you this much, I should tell you all I have been told, Hermione. Ron and Lavender have been shagging since early September."

"THAT BASTARD!" Hermione broke down and cried for a long time.

CHAPTER FOUR

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"You knew Lavender was pregnant before you left," Harry said.

"Sorry, forgot."

"What's worse is while he was cheating on you with Lav, he was also cheating on her. For all I know, he still is. But unlike you, Lav was a bit of a doormat. The gossip is he has several 'love children' out there."

"You're kidding!"

"It's true. Or at least it's true that there's a rumor about Ron's love children. A lot has changed."

"Now I'm glad I never returned!"

"Can I be honest with you, Hermione?"

"Can you?"

"When I said goodbye to you at Heathrow when you left to search for your parents, part of me felt it was - it was final. I felt you were not coming back. The War had messed everything up. I felt that once you found your parents, you'd move on. Did you find them?"

MONDAY - AUGUST 9, 1999 - SIDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA.

Hermione had been in Australia almost a month. So far, all she had really seen was Sidney and the surrounding area, but the city had amazed her. No sooner than she first stepped off the plane from London and she was looking at a large sign proclaiming SYDNEY 2000! with a picture of strange but amazing looking white walled and glass building that for some reason reminded her of clams that she soon learned was the Opera House. There was a symbol below it: five interlocking rings, three on top and two below. She knew she had seen that symbol somewhere, but could not remember where.

On her first ride through the city to the very nice hotel she stayed in upon arriving, there were similar signs seemingly all over the place. Some showed landmarks, but others showed what were clearly athletes. A large Nike sign caught her eye showing a young man in incredible shape and mostly naked. "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie," it said. Again, the rings! It then hit her - the Olympics. After eight years as a witch living in the insular world of magical Britain, she had totally forgotten about a lot of "Muggle" things such as the Olympics. She remembered what they were - the largest sporting event in the World with athletes from all over the planet competing. She had seen something on the telly when she was eight. Her Mum and Dad had been glued to the telly during February of that year and again in August watching a myriad of sports. She vaguely remembered something about "Eddie the Eagle," a British ski jumper who barely could ski and a sledding team from a country where it never snowed. She had been fascinated with the figure skating and later that year, gymnastics. She wanted to be one of those graceful young women, one day.

So it seemed the Olympics were coming to Australia next summer, she mused. I wonder if I'll still be here to see them.

When she arrived, she was confident she would find her parents fairly quickly. She was the best student in her school and could research any topic. Besides, there were only about twenty million people in all of Australia. How hard could it be? Now, a month later, she was beginning to think it was damned near impossible. She had hoped to move from place to place, just as she had during the war. But moving around Britain was easy. In Australia, the distances involved were daunting to say the least.

Hermione had entered the country as Jane Granger. She used her middle name because she knew Ronald did not know it. She met up with her first Australian witch and wizard while passing through customs. To her surprise, the Aussies had magical customs at their international airports. After she had been thoroughly checked out by two members of the Australian Magical Police, they explained to her that they were looking for refugees from the recent war in Britain - in particular, the evil witches and wizards from the losing side. They explained that magical transport across the oceans was practically impossible so the fugitives would only come through on Muggle transport. The Aussies used the term "non-magical."

Once it was determined she was not a dark witch on the run from the repercussions of the lost war, she was asked what brought her to Australia. She explained that soon after the war had broken out, she had sent her parents here to be safe. They were not magical, and the enemy was hunting down people like them and killing them for having a magical child. Magical Customs was able to confirm that Wendell and Monica Wilkins from her home town had indeed arrived in country on July 7, 1997. While there were some records indicating the Wilkins' had left for Thailand and other vacation spots, the current records indicated they had returned to Australia through Perth about a year ago and had not left since. Perth was a city on the west coast, over two thousand miles away.

She was given the name of a contact at non-magical customs to inquire further. The problem was that the contact was on holiday for three weeks. Fine, she had thought, I'll just do what I can to find them between now and then. Three weeks! If she was going to be here that long, she wondered if she could rent a flat rather than pay through the nose for a hotel room.

The two magical customs agents also told her about The Billabong, Sidney's equivalent of the magical center of London. After settling to her Hotel, Hermione went to check it out the next day. Whereas Diagon Alley in London looked like it had been torn from the page of a Dickens novel, Billabong looked like a modern shopping district. The only clue that it was for magical folk was the means of entry and the wares on display for sale. Being Hermione, she headed strait for the nearest bookstore. To Hermione's surprise, even in the Billabong (which she soon learned was an Aboriginal term for a river or pond) there were posters declaring the upcoming Olympics. It seemed that magical Australia was as excited about the event as the rest of the country.

The store was huge! She spent several hours there browsing and selected several books on magical Australia for her reading. What shocked her was the large section with what looked like non-magical things. She saw what she knew had to be a section with Compact Disks of music, another with movies - non-magical movies on tape and in the new DVD format her parents had been talking about getting a couple of years ago. There were also computer programs. She wondered how that could be? In Britain, she had been taught that magic and electronics don't mix. Apparently, the rules were different here in so many ways. In the Charms Section, she found a

book on Electronics Protection Charms that she added to her growing collection.

The bookstore was not the only surprise. There were stores that actually sold electronics: radios, televisions, computers, cell phones, stereos, video recorders and a whole host of others. There were even digital cameras that took the moving magical photos she had grown accustomed to in color - which she had never seen in a magical photo. She was flush with money from her reward for her part in the downfall of the most evil wizard in ages and bought a phone, camera and a laptop computer - as well as a book on using a computer.

To her surprise, she also found adds for flats or asking for roommates. She collected a few of these and returned to her hotel. She returned to her hotel, laden down with books and new gadgets. Fortunately, she had kept her special purse she had made herself some two years ago and was able to carry everything out without difficulty. For the next three days, she stayed in her room and read. She was Hermione Granger, that's what she did.

By the end she came to a realization. Her home, Britain, was backwards. It was a third-world country - at least the magical part was. The Aussies only hid their magic from their neighbors. So unlike Britain. Australia was enlightened compared to her insular magical home. The magical Aussies were fully integrated into the greater Australia. Their government - while secret - was part of the greater Australian government. Their children attended magical schools - or programs. But they would also attend university and grow up to get jobs in and outside of magical fields. At least four potential members of the Aussie Olympic Team would be magical - of course, they could not use magic at the Games. Still!

The longer Hermione stayed in Australia, the less she wanted to go home. She would, of course, if her parents wanted to. But what if they didn't? Australia was amazing! Maybe they would not want to leave. The only reason to even consider going back was Harry. She missed him so much. But he had not ... she would not go back just to be his friend.

Within a week, Hermione was sharing a flat with another young witch named Amanda O'Hare. Amanda was a couple of years older and studying Literature at a university in Sydney. When they met,

Hermione explained that she was in Australia to find her parents and had no idea how long it would take. Weeks for certain, maybe longer. Amanda seemed thrilled to meet someone from England. She and Hermione hit it off to Hermione's surprise. Amanda was a little disappointed that Hermione might not be a long term roommate, but she liked her. She soon made certain that Hermione saw the sights and learned as much about Australia as possible. Of course, Amanda knew Hermione as Jane Granger.

She tried to set Hermione up on a date a couple weeks ago. Her boyfriend Roger had a friend and such. Hermione had to tell Amanda about her recent experiences. She used Harry and Ron's middle names and avoided their last names altogether. Bill (Ron) had cheated on her. James (Harry), well their relationship was confusing at best. She needed time before she could consider dating again. Amanda - bless her - did not press the issue.

Today she woke up and began her morning routine which would eventually find her in the library a few miles away pouring through books and, most critical for her mission, phone directories. She was fairly certain her parents were not in Sydney and her search was slowly expanding to the north, south and west. She was methodical and she prayed that they had not settled in Perth to the far west. First of all, the library had no directories for Perth and second, it would be the last place her search would look. She figured that at the rate she was going, she might just get to see the Sydney Olympics before she found her parents. She had mixed feelings about that. She was falling in love with Australia and its cosmopolitan - as she saw it - magical community.

There were only two reasons to ever consider returning to Britain: she was from there - not reason enough at all - and Harry was there. If only he had given her a clear reason to return, she mused. He hadn't. Mixed signals. She was suddenly hit by a massive wave of nausea. Soon, she was face down in the loo losing what little her pre-breakfast stomach had contained. For a week she suffered through her first ever bouts of heartburn, now this? Must be the stress.

SATURDAY - AUGUST 21, 1999 - SIDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA.

"Janie?" Amanda called. "You're not throwing up AGAIN?"

Hermione could not say anything because she was. Something was wrong with her and she knew it. Stress, she was convinced. Still...

"Janie, you need to see a Doctor!"

"I'm fine," Hermione called from the loo. "It's just the stress of..."

"Bollocks! Something is wrong with you, Janie! I'm your friend, Janie! I may be sharing a flat with you, but I am your friend. I won't stand by and watch you die."

"It's not that bad," Hermione complained.

"You've been losing your lunch for over a week, Janie! Every day! You are either suffering from an acute eating disorder - but you're not losing weight as far as I can tell - or you got something else wrong with you."

"It's just stress!"

"No it's not, Janie! Something is wrong with you. You need to see a Doctor."

"I - "

"I insist!"

"But I am a witch. I need to see a Healer, just in case..."

"Same difference here. Healer is such a quaint term. Not even our Aborigines use it except for the most primitive of magical medical styles. I have a Doc in mind. She's real good. She'll fix you up proper."

"It's Saturday, surely her office is closed."

"Probably. But I can see about getting you an appointment early next week."

"How? I mean if the office is closed, how can you schedule an appointment?"

"On the Internet. Her Website can be used to schedule appointments."

"The what? Her what?"

"Crickey! You've never heard of the Internet?"

"Should I have?"

"Everything is on the Internet. It's a world wide computer network. You can find anything on it. Most businesses have their own sites - some better than others. Dr. Mears site allows patients to schedule appointments. Course, you can also ring the office, but the Internet doesn't put you on hold or shuffle you to voice mail. I'll show you."

Hermione followed Amanda to her room where Hermione could see a computer set up on her desk. It was already running. Amanda sat at her desks and Hermione watched in awe as her friends fingers flew over the confusing keyboard. How did she know where the letters were? They seemed to be in random order. She also used a separate device that Hermione say seemed to move a pointer across the screen. Amanda asked Hermione a series of questions, the answers appeared on the screen soon after Hermione spoke. With a final flourish, there was a click and Hermione heard a whir as the machine next to the computer began to do something. Soon, Amanda handed Hermione a couple of sheets of paper.

"There," Amanda said. "You have an appointment with Dr. Mears at 11:30 Monday morning - the top sheet is the confirmation. Beneath that are directions to her office."

"Amazing!"

"You've never used a computer before?" Amanda asked?

"I bought one soon after I arrived," Hermione said, "but no. Not really."

"Why not?"

"Erm," Hermione seemed embarrassed, "we were always told that magic messed them up."

"Don't they know the Electronics Buffer Charm in Britain?"

"I don't think so," Hermione responded. She then remembered Harry. "Then again, I do have a friend back home who's got a telly and a lot of other electrical devices. Still, some consider him a bit odd."

"Why?"

"Well, like me, James was raised by Muggles, so he's used to that. Most of those who I know who were raised in magical families - all, in fact - have no interest in or understanding of technology."

"Daddy always said you Brits were a backwards lot," Amanda said.

"Came to that conclusion practically the day I arrived here," Hermione shrugged. "Can you find anything on here?"

"If the information is out there in cyberspace, yeah. Pretty much."

"Wow! Can I try?"

"Sure. What do you want to look up?" Amanda asked.

Hermione could not help but roll her eyes. Amanda actually laughed. Hermione looked at the keyboard and frowned. "This makes no sense at all," Hermione complained! "Q-W-E-R-T-Y... It's illogical."

"Nonsense," Amanda said. "It's a standard typewriter keyboard. It makes no sense if you only use one or two fingers to type. It makes perfect sense if you use both hands, but that takes practice. There is a logic to it based upon which fingers people use more often and which letters are most frequently used, or so I'm told. Did not take a typing course myself. Few do these days. Most kids learn to type before they learn to write, I'm told."

"Blimey!"

"Let me guess," Amanda laughed, "they probably use fountain pens back in Jolly Ol' England."

"Quills, actually."

"You're joking!"

Hermione shook her head.

"And Owl Post?"

Hermione nodded feeling somehow inadequate.

"Well, that might work in England, but it never worked here. Didn't work well in the Americas either," Amanda said. "Owls traveling by day tended to wind up as dinner for some predator or another. So much for mail. Besides, the distances are too vast. Mind you, there are some nutters who keep Post Owls for nostalgic reasons and Clubs that breed and show them, but we don't use them to carry the post."

"What do you use?"

"We use regular post for letters and packages that don't have to get there immediately. If I need a package to get to its destination tomorrow, I can pay a little extra and use one of the parcel services. I could send a package to England today and it would get to its destination tomorrow. Increasingly, everyone is using e-mail for letters and such."

"E-mail?"

"Computers," Amanda said. "If you have an e-mail account, I could send you a note or letter. I type it in here and send it. It would reach your account within seconds, even if you were half way around the world. When you checked your account - which I do daily - you would have my note. It would take days or weeks otherwise."

"I guess we really are a little backwards," Hermione confessed. "So, how do I use this to find my parents?"

"Type in their names and let's see what happens," Amanda said.

It took Hermione a while, but the names "Wendell Wilkens" and "Monica Wilkins" soon appeared on the search bar. Amanda showed her what to do next. The computer flickered and a list of things showed up.

"What's all this?" Hermione asked.

"The computer searched all accessible databases for the terms - your parents' names. It lists every site or reference on the network from anywhere on earth. It guesses which is the most likely. Any look promising?"

"This one," Hermione pointed. "Sun Coast Dentistry. It appears to be here in Australia and my parents are dentists."

"Click on it and see what happens."

Tentatively, Hermione clicked on the title as Amanda had instructed. "It might take a minute or two," Amanda said. "I really need to upgrade from dial up to DSL or something."

"What?"

"DSL is a high speed internet connection. I use the phone lines. They're bloody slow. We have DSL at the University. Lightening fast that is, but this flat isn't wired for it and I can't afford to have it installed. My landlord's one cheap bastard! Ah, here we go!"

A new screen appeared on the computer with a banner headline "SUN COAST DENTISTRY, SHOALWATER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA." It advertised that it was a family practice specializing in pediatric dentistry and orthodontics, her parents' specialties. The page said appointments could be made online or by phone and it gave the address and phone number. There was no other information. Hermione frowned.

"It says nothing about who the dentists are," she began.

"This is the homepage," Amanda said. "See the bar along the top?"

Hermione nodded.

"Click on 'About Us,'" Amanda suggested.

Hermione did and after several excruciating seconds, the screen changed. There was a picture of a man she recognized, beside the picture was a name and brief biography: "Dr. Wendell Wilkens, DDS," it began. She knew who it was and scrolled down to another

picture of a woman: "Dr. Monica Wilkens, DDS." Hermione gasped and her hands instinctively covered her mouth.

"Janie," her friend asked, seeing tears forming in Hermione's eyes.

"My - those are my - my parents," Hermione said.

"See," Amanda said, "the internet is the future, friend."

"Three weeks," Hermione thought out loud, "three weeks in a library and it took all of five minutes on a computer! If I had continued, it would have taken months!"

"If ever," Amanda added.

Hermione nodded in agreement. "Where is this Shoalwater?"

"It says Western Australia," Amanda replied. "Probably on the West Coast - about three thousand kilometers as the owl flies. Aside from that, bugger all if I know."

"How could you not," Hermione began in protest!

"This isn't England, Janie dear. We may have fewer people, but this country is huge. I've never been out west and I've lived here me whole life. I know of Perth, Fremantle and Darwin and that's bloody well it. Sorry."

"Can we find out?"

"That too is easy," Amanda said. "You can get maps and directions off the internet as well. Give me a moment to print hard copies and I'll show you." She then showed Hermione how to print.

It turned out that Shoalwater was a beachfront town just south of Perth, the large port city on the west coast of Australia. The web sites seemed to suggest it was, as Amanda said "Posh." Her parents must be doing alright in their new home, Hermione thought. She was so excited. She kept pestering her friend for information on how to make plane reservations and such online. It was clear she wanted to leave right away.

"Damn it, Janie," Amanda protested!

"What?" Hermione replied.

"You promised me!"

"What?"

"You promised me you'd see the doctor! I'm not letting you leave here just to drop dead on your parents' doorstep. They look like they're doing well, Janie! They'll be there when you are well."

"It's been so long," Hermione complained.

"I know, Janie. I know. Still, it may only be a few more days. Please? For them? For me? Please wait until we know what's wrong with you?"

Amanda had been such a friend during Hermione's time in Australia. Hermione had no idea what she would have done without this woman. Amanda understood her more than she expected. Amanda had lost her parents a few years ago in a plane crash. Like Hermione, Amanda's parents were not magical. They were scientists and on a trip into the Outback to study rocks and such, the bush plane had crashed. There were no survivors. Amanda was all too happy to help her roommate - potential orphan friend find her parents. Like Hermione, though, Amanda was practical and would not allow her sick friend to risk further damage to her health when Hermione's parents seemed safe. Hermione - reluctantly to be sure - agreed to see the Doctor and await any results before jumping on the first plane to Perth.

MONDAY - AUGUST 30, 1999 - SUN COAST DENTISTRY.
SHOALWATER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Hermione sat in her rental car in the small parking lot. She had booked an appointment for 4:30 in the afternoon - the last open appointment of the day. It was 3:00. Perhaps she should drive around and see the sights, but she was too scared and excited. She had found her parents and was eager to see them finally.

She had seen the doctor and found out what was wrong. The good news was she was not sick or dying. The bad news was she had no idea what she was going to do now. Amanda had been such a

friend. She never had a girlfriend like that back home and she told Amanda that as she boarded her flight from Sydney. Amanda had taught her a lot about computers - or at least using the internet and e-mail. Hermione promised her friend she would keep in touch, and she meant it. She even hoped she would be back in Sydney soon. They had talked about becoming volunteers for the 2000 Olympic Games - for it was said that off duty volunteers might get free tickets to the events. Amanda wanted to see the swimming - she had a thing for the Australian swimming sensation Ian Thorpe.

First things first, Hermione thought. I came here to find my parents!

She sat in the car and watched. Her parents' practice seemed to be even busier than their practice had ever been back home. It pleased her in a way, although it gave her pause as well. This place was a lot prettier than England. The ocean was blue, skies clear, weather warm, there were palm trees and such. Paradise, she thought. No way her parents would want to return to dreary ol' England. It was the end of the Australian winter and the weather had been cool - but seldom cold. England was a dump compared to this place. That's okay, though, she thought. If Mum and Dad like it here, I'll stay as well. Although, she thought, I'll probably choose to live in Sydney. She liked it there and she could hook up to the Australian Magical Transit to visit her parents whenever she liked.

At 4:15 she left her car and entered the office.

"May I help you?" The young receptionist asked.

"Jane Granger," Hermione said. "I have an appointment." She had booked one online the week before.

"Not from around here, are you?" The receptionist asked.

"I - no. England."

"Thought so. You sound like the Wilkens'. Good people they are. Me Dad always thought you Limeys were useless, then again he's big into the Ashes."

"What?"

"Cricket love! Blimey! Don't you know?"

"Sorry. Never was into sports," Hermione said.

"Makes two of us," the receptionist replied with a laugh. "Although that Ian Thorpe bloke - I might just have to change me mind 'bout swimming. Have a seat, please." The receptionist giggled. The whole bloody country was mad about the Olympics, Hermione thought to herself.

Soon, Hermione found herself in a room having her teeth x-rayed. Then she was in an examination room as a technician cleaned her teeth and gave her a fluoride and whitening treatment.

"Brit," The technician asked.

"Argh," was all she could say in reply.

"You smoke?"

"Arraah," she growled an attempt at a negative as the cleaning tools kept her mouth opened.

"Drink tea?"

"Nah Mugh," Not much, she meant.

"Coffee?"

"Ouoos," Loads, she meant.

"Explains it. Aside from some staining, you really have taken good care of your teeth. Two years since your last dentist visit?"

"Uh Huh," Hermione replied.

"Well, tartar seems to be a minor problem. You should use a whitener, though. Either that or give up on coffee."

"Ann ooh Aaah," Can't do that.

"Who can, love. Whitener then, okay?"

"Arrr."

After the cleaning, a young looking man came in. "I'm Dr. Smith," he said. "I'll be checking you out."

"What about Dr. Wilkens," Hermione asked in a near panic.

"No worries, Love, I am competent."

"It's not that," Hermione said. "I'm from England and they were my dentists there."

"Well, Dr. Wilkens has made it clear that once my exam is done, she wants to meet you - okay? She's up to it in paperwork right now. Now open your mouth, Love."

Even though her parents were dentists, Hermione never had gotten used to the plink, plink, plink of the pick searching for cavities. It had always bothered her.

"Still got your wisdom teeth," Dr. Smith said. "And they came in strait. You're a lucky one." Plink. Plink. Plink.

After a rinse, he was finally finished. "Well," he said, "you should be pleased to learn that you have no cavities. Oddly, you have incredibly good and strait teeth for a Brit. Then again, Dr. Wilkens is - it's an honor to work for such a quality dentist."

Hermione soon found herself in a large office by herself. Dr. Wilkens was apparently dealing with a difficult patient, but would be with her directly. Although it had been almost a year, Hermione had spent nearly three months as an Auror before she returned to school and years at war. Her suspicions were aroused and she was on guard, but she had lost some of her tactical senses. Her back was to the door, for instance as she surveyed the office. Before she could take it all in, she heard the door open and a woman's voice asked cautiously: "Hermione?"

Hermione turned around and saw her mother. Her first thought was joy, followed closely by how did she know it was me? I haven't lifted the charm? She nodded and was suddenly smothered in a hug the like of which she could barely remember from her mother and kisses as well, another oddity.

"Oh, my darling girl," her mother gushed! "Thank God! Thank God you're back! When I saw that a 'Jane Granger' from Britain had booked an appointment - well you can imagine! I prayed it was you! And it is! And I had thought you had died in the War! Thank God!"

Through her own tears, Hermione suddenly thought something was wrong. How could she remember me - before she saw me, Hermione thought. The charm she had used was supposedly foolproof. The only way for her parents to remember their true past was if they saw her up close and in the flesh as it were. There was no way that her Mum could remember her before this moment. No way, but...

"Y-you remember me?" Hermione asked.

"Of course," Rose Granger replied.

"H-how? That charm was..."

"You told us, remember? You told us it would last until either you found us again or we died, right?"

Hermione nodded.

"Have a seat."

"I..."

"Please, Hermione?"

Hermione sat on the couch. She watched in silence as her mother pulled some papers from a drawer in her desk.

"So, my charm did not work," Hermione began.

"It worked just fine, Love," her mother replied as she sat beside Hermione.

"But how then?" Hermione began again.

"You told us - your father and me - that there were only two ways to break it. There were only two ways we might ever remember you

were our daughter: first, you found us and we saw you, and second when we died."

"I don't understand," Hermione began.

Her mother handed her some papers. "Read, my Darling," she said gravely, "it's from your father."

17 June, 1999

My Little Angel:

I hope and pray you are reading this. I hope this letter finds you and finds you well. Your mother and I have feared these past few hours since your charm lifted that it meant you had died. If you are reading this, then our fears were silly. Forgive us, please?

We understood why you had to do this to us. You know we never liked it, but we did understand. We've tried so hard to understand you, always. We are now in Australia where they are more understanding and compassionate with us non-magical parents. Mum will explain.

Hermione, I am very sick. I think - no I pray - that's why your brilliant charm is failing and why you mother any I are remembering our perfect little girl. You told us that the spell would last a lifetime, and it seems it has. I am dictating this letter for I am too weak to write. I have cancer, and the Doctors have told me there's nothing left to be done. I have but a day or two left to live at best.

We are so proud of you, My Darling! So proud! I remember the first time I ever held you! I remember how perfect you were! I remember everything about you and how proud I was in every one of your accomplishments. You were and are so smart, so compassionate, such a joy to know. You have made our lives so much more meaningful just by being. I was and am so proud of you. I loved your studiousness and loved it even more when I learned you had friends. We were so worried when we sent you off to Hogwarts that it would be more of the same for you, but it wasn't, was it?

Prefect! Top of your class! Great friends! And most recently, so brave. My little Boudicca! How could I not be prouder? (I guess you could win gold medals at the Olympics, but all said, that's probably

asking a bit much, although I have no doubt that if that was your goal you would be there as well!)

I was blessed, My Angel. I was blessed with being able to watch you grow as a person. I was blessed in watching you turn from an awkward, yet studious child, into a stunning young woman. I am so proud of you and so blessed by being able to say that I was lucky enough to have you as my daughter. I could not ask for more in this life and therefore my life is complete and I leave it soon without any regrets.

I know this is a lot to ask, My Angel. But, I do not want you to mourn me too much. I have lived a full life. I had the perfect wife and marriage, more than most can hope for. And, I had you, the perfect daughter. I have loved you since the day you were born - maybe even before then. I loved you even after we learned about your abilities. Despite what you may think, when we learned of your abilities, it explained a lot and we could not have been prouder or you.

I love you, My Angel. I always have and always will. If this letter never finds you, then we shall soon meet again in Heaven. If it does, then I want you to know that I do love you. I shall watch over you and do what I can to keep you safe and happy. We will meet again in better times. Try not to shed too many tears for me, because I face not the end, but a new beginning and we shall meet again and I look forward to that day - although I pray it's a long, long time from now. All I want for now is for you to be happy, My Angel. Please try?

I want to thank you, My Angel. I want to thank you for being born and for being my daughter. I even want to thank you for Australia. It turned out to be our second chance - your Mum and me. As painful as this time is, we would not have missed this for the world and if we had to do it all over again, we cannot envision a life without our Hermione in it!

Goodbye, My Hermione!

Love always:

Daddy

"No," Hermione whimpered weakly, "no..."

"Your father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in March. He passed away two days after this letter, 'Mione."

"NOOOO!" Hermione lost it and cried inconsolably. Her mother held her as she let go.

"I-it's all my fault," Hermione finally whimpered, "all my fault!"

"Hush Love," her mother said stroking her hair, "hush. It's not."

"I-if I-I hadn't s-sent y-you away..."

"Don't be silly! If we had stayed, you know what would have happened!"

"I could have - I should have..."

"Hush! You did the right thing, Love. You told us why you had to do it. We knew the risks you were taking and how necessary it was for you to believe we were safe. We understood, even if we did not like the idea of having to forget you for a time. We knew you'd find us one day if you lived and were grateful that we would not have to be there to bury our perfect little girl in a way. We understood."

"But Daddy! If I h-hadn't..."

"Your father would still have died, love."

"M-my fault!"

"Hush, Love! It's not your fault! Your charm did not give him his cancer, neither did Australia. In all probability, he would have gotten it anyway. It's practically incurable, yet mercifully quick. And as you will see, we both are so thankful for the opportunity you gave us."

"Wh-what d-do you mean, Mum?"

"You will see, Love."

"I should have b-been here! I could have been!"

"I know."

"H-how?"

"After your charm broke - apparently it broke for both of us when it was clear he was going to pass - after it broke, I learned that the War had ended a year earlier and that you were probably alive. It was in the Wizing papers even here, 'Mione. Still, a year had gone by and..."

"I wanted to, Mum, honestly! But my ex-boyfriend begged me to stay and Harry did as well. There was so much to do. Then, I learned I could finish school if - and only if - I returned last September First. I knew you would want me to, so... I'm SO SORRY!"

"Don't be, Love. We would have expected you to and you know it."

"I-I should have been here!"

"You know how important your education was to us, Mione."

"Still..."

"Your father would have insisted you finish school."

"I should have been HERE!"

"Don't you beat yourself up, Hermione! Don't you dare! Your father would have wanted you to finish your education! He would have wanted you to take your - what are they called? Your Seventh Year exams?"

"N.E.W.T.s - Nastily Exhausting Wizards Test."

Her mother chuckled. "Did you take them?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how you did?"

"I had the scores transferred here, yes. All Outstandings."

"Your father would be so proud. I am."

"I should have been here!"

"Nonsense! How could you have known?"

"That's not the point, Mother!"

"It's entirely the point! You sent us here because the Enemy would probably have killed us, right?"

"Definitely, really. They got vicious not long after you left."

"So, we were spared out right murder. But there are no promises in life that fate cannot break. Your father could just as easily died in a car crash. Then again, this is Australia. It's loaded with deadly snakes and insects and man eating crocs - and that's just on land. Walking out in the grass could be a life ending experience on a bad day. Cancer? That was unexpected and there was nothing you could have done to save him."

"Still..."

"Hush! He is probably happy now that you did come back."

"How can you say that?"

"Because, there is something he would have wanted you to learn about. The reason why we both forgive you completely."

"Why's th-that?"

"You'll see."

Hermione had hoped she would be forgiven and prayed she would be invited to "come home." In such hope, she had checked out of her hotel before she drove to the dental clinic and her bags were in the car. After what seemed like a good cry, one in which she believed her mother joined her, her mother invited her home.

"Are - are you sure?"

"Don't be silly, child," her mother said. "You're my daughter and I've missed you so much. And - you've obviously got a lot to tell me."

Might take months," she laughed. "Of course you should come home!"

They decided to ride home in Rose / Monica's car. Hermione's rental would remain at the clinic until the morning, when she would return it. As they buckled in, Hermione surprised herself. She knew she would have to face this, she just had not been sure she wanted to so soon after learning about her father.

"Mum?"

"Yes Dear?"

"If - if it's not too much trouble, could we see Daddy?"

Her mother looked over and smiled at her long lost daughter. "Of course, Dear."

LATER THAT EVENING

Later, Hermione realized she was not as ready for the experience as she had hoped. Still, no worries as the Aussies' say. In a way she was glad she did not put it off. It was so hard doing it on the spur of the moment. It might have been unbearable had it been scheduled.

She had stood there, staring at the headstone that marked the last resting place of her Daddy. Her Daddy probably never stopped seeing her as his little girl, she thought as she sobbed, her mother's arm around her shoulder and her head resting on her mother's shoulder. She had never stopped seeing him as she had when she was much younger - when she was nothing more than her Daddy's Little Princess and when the real world of magic as nothing more than fantasy fiction she had loved to read. The fact that she would never see him again was a crushing weight. But what really had gotten to her and turned silent tears into loud sobs was the inscription on the headstone.

WENDELL WILKINS

14 November 1949 - 19 June 1999

Loving Father & Husband

Little Princess: If you are reading

this, remember I will love you

always...Daddy.

"He had to be buried under that name?" Hermione cried.

"All of our paperwork is under that name, Dear," her mother explained in as soothing a voice as possible. "He did not even realize it was an alias until..."

Hermione nodded.

"He was very happy as Wendell, Hermione, just as I was very happy as Monica. I am sure he does not mind it one bit."

"And the other inscription? Little Princess?"

"We did not know if you were alive. We did know that if you were, one day you might come looking for us. One day, you would find him. One day you would look upon this stone. In case you found him first, he wanted to make sure you knew just how special he thinks you are, Love."

Hermione cried for several minutes. She was not keeping track of the time. All the time, she thought about and remembered her father. There were unpleasant ones. No two people can live close to one another emotionally and not have an occasional spat. No parent or child can live their lives without some pain between them. Mostly, though, there were good memories. Memories of holidays, of reading together, of talking, of his smile, his laugh, his pride in her accomplishments all came back and slowly drowned the pain of loss she was feeling. Finally, with the red and gold sunset illuminating the western sky over the Indian Ocean, Hermione broke free of her mother and walked up to the headstone. Gently, she touched the polished granite. It felt so cold and final. She steeled herself, trying to reign in her emotions. No, she thought. I've done that most of my life. No need to anymore.

She cried some more. She thought she had never cried so much as in these past several weeks. She had probably shed more tears since the day she found out about Ron than she had her entire life.

Yet, she was feeling better in some way she did not yet understand. She felt free - free from her past. She bent down and kissed the stone, all that remained of her father - the one man who had never let her down, she thought.

"You were far too young to die, Daddy," she squeaked. "Far too young. You should have lived to see your grandbabies. You should have lived to see so many things. But, I feel grateful for every day I had with you and it was far better for me to have known you for so short a time than not at all. Thank you for being my Daddy. I will never forget and I will always love you. Goodbye."

Hermione stepped back and looked around. Aside from her mother, no one was there. She pulled her wand from her jacket pocket and gave it a wave. A large wreath of roses appeared with a sash proclaiming: "With Love Always, Daddy. Hermione." Her wand back in her pocket, she waved goodbye and turned to her mother who she could see was crying as well.

"Thank you, Mum," she said. With that, the two women walked back to the car.

CHAPTER FIVE

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"Found my Mum," Hermione said. "My dad died of cancer about two months before I left for Australia. Surely you knew this?"

Harry looked at her in confusion.

"I wrote you about it."

"I - I didn't get the letter," Harry said in confusion.

"What? I wrote you almost every month for almost four years! You didn't get any of my letters?"

"I got one, Hermione. You wrote me a few days after you arrived to tell me you made it there safely and then how hard it might be to find your parents. Got the letter just before my Birthday. Fifteen pages long, it was. I was at a loss at how you could come up with fifteen pages of material after just a few days, but you did. I was sent to Sydney on business the next year. Had no problem finding my way around thanks to that one letter. After that, nothing."

"How can that be? Did you move?"

Harry shook his head. "I still live at Grimmauld Place," he said.

"I - I don't understand." He doesn't know, she thought to herself. Oh my God, he doesn't know about anything. What am I going to do? She looked at Harry and saw his face turning red, not blushing red but angry red.

"Ginny," Harry growled. "That bitch!"

"What? What about Ginny?"

Harry sighed and seemed to relax. "She was over at my place the Saturday after you left begging to make up. She had heard about Ron and Lavender and said she now understood why I took you in. Called it 'Noble,' she did. Damn if she didn't know how to wrap me around her finger for a time. She moved in just after her Birthday.

She had a big fight with her Mum, she never told me what it was about, so she moved in. I should have guessed."

"What Harry?"

"International mail sent regular post," Harry thought out loud.

"What about it?"

"The London Magical Post delivers international regular post on Wednesdays only. International business, express and government mail is delivered every day. Personal or regular international mail is only delivered on Wednesdays."

"I still don't get it."

"Ginny was always home on Wednesdays. It was part of the League Contract with the players. They always had Wednesdays off. They did not travel, have a match or practice. As you may remember, I usually left for work early before the morning post arrived. Ginny usually went through the mail and..." Harry trailed off.

Hermione gasped. "She was reading my letters? She was keeping them from you?"

"I don't know if she read them. I don't think so. Ginny was not that good at keeping things secret. I think she just binned them."

"How can you be sure she wasn't reading them?"

"It's a logical assumption," Harry said. "Assuming..."

"What?"

"You knew Ginny. Was there anything in any of those letters that might set her off?"

Was there ever, Hermione thought. "Yes," she said meekly, "probably," she added.

"Well, if she had read it, I would have heard all about it. She never once mentioned anything about you - except the most recent Hermione Granger rumors printed in the Daily Prophet."

"Why didn't you write back?"

"Your first letter told me not to for a while. You said you would probably be on the move a lot and did not want to miss any letters from me, so you asked that I write, but save them until you either came home or settled somewhere for a time. I did write. Loads for a spell. I've saved all of them - just in case..."

"You did," Hermione croaked?

Harry nodded. "I never stopped, but I just assumed you didn't want to remember your past life or something."

"Harry, that's not true!"

Harry shrugged. "And I guessed you thought the same about me."

"I," Hermione began and then felt guilty. She did think Harry wanted nothing to do with her.

"Had I actually gotten a letter, I would have written. I would have sent all those letters I had stored up over the years."

"Harry. It wasn't your fault."

"Still."

"I kept writing for a time, Harry. It wasn't until the spring of '03 that I stopped." Thank God he never got that letter, she thought.

Harry nodded. "Ginny left me in June of '03," Harry said. "We got the annulment in August. Had you kept at it a couple more months, who knows?"

"Who knows," Hermione agreed.

"I'm sorry about your Dad," Harry finally said after a long pause.

"It's not your fault, Harry. It was Ron who held me back after the war. Had I left when I wanted to, maybe... No. He'd probably still be dead. But at least I would have been there. At least my last memory of him would not be a headstone in Australia with the wrong name on it."

Ron did not want me to leave. So I stayed. I stayed, went back to school, found out the git was cheating on me. And never saw my father again."

"I'm sorry."

"It wasn't your fault, Harry. There was a silver lining, though."

"Really?"

MONDAY - AUGUST 30, 1999 - WILKENS' RESIDENCE,
SHOALWATER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

They pulled up to the house in twilight. The place was much bigger than Hermione had expected. It seemed to dwarf the house in Loughton, Essex where she had grown up. Seemed a bit much for two people, she thought to herself.

"It's nice," she said absently to her Mum as they got out of the car - also bigger than the one she remembered in England.

"Bit much really," her mother admitted. "But it's less expensive than the old place. Land is not as scarce here than in Britain, it seems. Besides a place the size of our old place is probably in a bad neighborhood. So here we are. You can see the ocean in the distance and if the wind is right, hear the waves breaking. We liked it here."

They entered the front door. "Martha," Rose / Monica called out? "We're here!"

A short, plump middle aged woman entered the main room from somewhere. "Monica," she said. "Supper will be ready in a few." She then saw Hermione. "Is this," she asked Rose / Monica? Hermione saw her mother nod.

The short woman practically ran to Hermione and pulled her into a breath crushing hug. "You must be Hermione," she gushed. "I've heard all about you! I was so pleased when Monica called and said you were coming by. I'm so happy you didn't cop it as feared!"

"Th-thank you?" Hermione was still getting used to how open the Australians were. She wondered if she could ever lose the infamous British "stiff upper lip" mentality.

"Hermione," her mother said, "this is Martha McGregor. Your father and I hired her a little over a year ago when things got hectic. She takes care of the house."

"Pleased to meet you," Hermione said.

"Pleasure's mine, love," Martha beamed. "I'll just kip back into the kitchen then and finish supper while you two get reacquainted."

Hermione was certain she saw Martha wink at her Mum.

"Sun Room," Martha seemed to suggest.

Hermione's mother smiled, took Hermione by the hand and led her towards the back of the house. They entered a large room with windows on three sides. Hermione could see the final glow of the fading twilight. It was a lovely house she thought. Then a laugh broke her thoughts. It was a very young laugh - a baby's laugh and it seemed to come from the floor in front of her. She noted her mother moving into the room and bending over and - and it could not be, could it?

"Mama!" an excited little voice exclaimed! Hermione saw a baby, not much more than a year old who had been playing with brightly colored toys. She had shoulder length, curly brown hair. Not unlike my own, Hermione thought as she absently ran a hand through her own locks. She also had brown eyes. Big smile, Hermione thought, and teeth. It can't be, can it? The little one squealed with delight as Rose / Monica scooped her up off the ground.

"Fen?" the little one seemed to ask.

Hermione's Mum kissed the little one on the forehead, causing the baby to giggle. "You're so smart," she said to the baby. "Yes Love, Friend. More than that."

Hermione's jaw hung open in surprise.

"Hermione?" her mother asked.

"Y-yes?"

"I want you to meet someone special. This is your sister. Daphne."

"Me," the baby exclaimed!

The next thing Hermione remembered was waking up on her back on the floor to the sounds of the baby's voice saying "Owie," over and over. She could feel a very small hand stroking her forehead and hair. "Owie." She also felt a slight weight on her chest. "Owie," the little voice said.

Hermione opened her eyes and saw the little face of her sister above her. Daphne was not looking at her face, but somewhere just above it and her tiny hands seemed to dance on Hermione's forehead and run through her hair. "Owie," Daphne said. Then, the baby's brown eyes looked into Hermione's and Daphne seemed to beam at her big sister. Daphne giggled and clapped her hands over her head. She has a lovely smile, Hermione thought. The weight seemed to lift and Hermione watched Daphne rise into the air in her mother's arms. Hermione sat up and leaned back against a couch.

"What - what happened?" She asked.

"You fainted," her mother said. "Are you alright? You're not sick, are you?"

No. Hermione thought. "No, Mother. It's been a bit of a day is all. What happened? Why was she..."

"You fell face first, Hermione," her mother said. "Busted nose, a nasty gash over your right eye that required stitches..."

Instinctively Hermione began to check herself out. Nose felt normal and she found no gash or bandages. "Mum?"

"You should thank Daphne," her mother said.

"She's a witch?"

"Naturally."

"But what..."

"She's what's called a Healer Manifestation, Hermione. Have you heard of that?"

Hermione shook her head.

"The term describes a particular way a child manifests their magic. Most magical children are Outburst Manifestations. When they first express magic, it's out of fear, anger or frustration or some other emotion. Magic is instinctively defensive in nature that is without training it is expressed as some sort of self-preservation or protection motive. You were an Outburst type, you know."

Hermione merely nodded. She was confused. Where did her mum learn this?

"Healer and Empath Manifestations are rare," her mother continued. "The child expresses magic not out of self interest or fear, but out of compassion for others. The Healer Manifest can unconsciously heal injuries and reduce or eliminate physical pain." Hermione heard a hitch in her mother's voice. "When your father got sick ... well, they say little Daphne here probably kept him alive a lot longer than expected. When he did pass, it was peaceful."

After a long pause, Rose Granger continued. "The Empath can control another person's emotional pain and such. The Healers and Empaths also express magic far sooner than most others on average. Daphne here first expressed magic at the age of four months when I burned myself on a hot pan. You were about two when your father and I first noticed your magic - of course we didn't know what it was then."

Hermione remembered the story told to her years later after she and her parents learned she was a real witch. She had been sent to bed early and wanted to read a book - or at least look at the pictures. The book she wanted was in another room and she was not allowed to leave to get it. She also was not allowed to turn on her bedroom lights when she was sent to bed for the night. Her parents had found her reading the book her well lit bedroom. As they yelled at her for breaking the rules, they noticed that while there was light, the lights were not on. Years later it was funny. At the time it was disturbing - but harmless.

"I don't understand any of this," Hermione complained.

"Any of what?"

"Well, first of all, how - why - er - I mean - Daphne. You're too old to..."

"Nonsense, Hermione. Obviously I am not too old, or at least I wasn't. Are you upset at finding out you have a sister?"

"No," Hermione replied quickly. "She's adorable, Mum. And you know I always wanted a younger brother or sister."

That much was true. Since the age of three until Hermione was nine or ten when she gave up asking, she always asked her parents for a brother or sister as a Christmas or Birthday present.

"It's just that I didn't think you wanted another child." Hermione sighed. "There was a part of me that always believed I was an only child because my strange talent scared you and Dad." Hermione realized she had never told either her parents that before.

"Don't be silly, Hermione. Your Dad and I loved you regardless. Truth is we wanted another child. Your Dad and I were only children and we did not want you to grow up one as well. We did not care if our second child was as magical as you or not. Your magic had nothing to do with anything. When you were born, your father and I were still studying Dentistry. As you know, we met in college after he left the British Army. Anyway, raising a small child while in school and later while building our practice was not easy. Raising any child would not have been. We decided to wait until things settled down as it were. When it finally did, you were off at Hogwarts and I was thirty-five and we agreed it might be too late."

"Then how did Daphne come about?"

"Hermione! Don't tell me I have to tell you where babies come from," her mother laughed.

Hermione blushed red even though she knew her mother was teasing her. "Of course not! You and Dad told me that when I was eleven." And I am acutely aware of it now.

"Well then, I guess it all begins with that Memory Charm you used. Your own invention, I take it?"

Hermione nodded. How did she know?

"As I understand it," her mother continued, "it targeted only certain types of memories. It was kind of like a computer search. All references to Hermione were written over or hidden. No one could know we had any connection with our lovely daughter Hermione. We were no longer the Grangers and we had no knowledge of magic or anything - as our knowledge of magic was related to our knowledge of our daughter.

"If it did not involve you directly or indirectly, however, the memories were unchanged. So, your Dad and I still remembered our wedding, how and when we met, our first kiss, the first time we had sex, our lives back home (now as the Wilkens) and everything else. We also remembered, at least at a subconscious level, that we wanted a child. We had wanted one when we married and still wanted one. What we did not have a clear memory of was why we had not had one. Each of us wrote over this gap with the conclusion that we did not have a child because we were physically incapable of having one. We were barren.

"Each of us also wrote over the gap with our unaltered beliefs, such as we were both opposed to artificial insemination and fertility treatments and how bloody hard it is to adopt a child - especially where we had only just immigrated to a new country. But, we still loved each other and still had sex. Unlike before, because we believed we were barren, we saw no need for precautions. Mind you, I did not get pregnant the night we arrived here, but it was not long after when I did. And, on April 10, 1998, your sister was born."

Hermione giggled.

"What?" Her mother asked.

"I was just thinking. If I had known all I had to do to get you two to give me a younger brother or sister was alter your memories a bit, I might have done it ages ago."

"You wouldn't!"

"You're right, Mum. I would not have. But I would have thought about it," Hermione replied mischievously. "Another thing confuses me."

"What's that?"

"You seem to know far more about magic now then when I last saw you. I know I didn't tell you most of that."

"Ah," her mother said. "Welcome to Australia!" She laughed.

"I - I don't understand."

"Course not. You came of age in backwards ol' England, not the progressive Down Under."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, as you probably know, most witches and wizards can be detected at birth."

Hermione nodded.

"In Merry Ole England, if said witch or wizard is born to non-magical parents, nothing happens until the child reaches the age when they are to be sent to magical school. Until then, the child and the parents have no idea about magic. Stupid policy. While your father and I did not see your magic as an issue, fair bet others do. I've heard tale of exorcisms, divorce and psychiatric wards as fates for some non-magical families with magical children. Not so here in Australia."

"It's not?"

"No. Three weeks after Daphne was born, we were approached by a lovely couple from the Australian Magical Child Welfare Department. They were a witch and wizard and they told us our Daphne was

magical. We were given a choice - an easy one for us. We would be enrolled in a transition program where we would learn about magic and how to raise a magical child and later, we would be encouraged to participate - to the extent that we could - in her formal magical education or..."

"Or?"

"Or Daphne would become a ward of the state and would be adopted by a magical parent or parents. Most parents join the magical world, although there are always going to be a few who don't. We, of course, were not about to lose our 'only' child, our 'little miracle,' as we saw her. We jumped in with both feet as it were."

"I wish it had been that way for me - for us, Mum."

"So do I, Hermione, so do I. Oh my!" Hermione saw her mother look down at Daphne who had curled up in her big sister's lap. Oddly, Hermione had not noticed. Daphne was fast asleep.

"Well then," her mother said. "I guess I'll tuck her into bed for the night and then we can sit down to dinner and talk some more."

"I'd like that," Hermione said as her mother began to leave with her sleeping sister. "And Mum?"

"Yes Dear?"

"I've missed you! I have missed you so much!"

"I've missed you too, Dear, even when I didn't remember you existed a part of me missed you desperately. Can you promise me something?"

"Anything."

"No more wars for a while?"

"That is something I think I can promise!"

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"Silver lining?" Harry asked.

Harry raised an eyebrow as he watched Hermione fumble through her purse. She handed Harry a photo of a girl that looked like a young version of herself. Same hair, same eyes, same expression, same teeth - the teeth Hermione had when she was much younger. "Your daughter,? Harry asked.

"Don't say that to her. She hates that. No, she's my little sister Daphne. My Mum and Dad had her in Australia. She's eight now. Born April 10th, 1998."

"That's the same day as Teddy Lupin!"

"Really?"

Harry nodded.

"I guess I forgot about that. Sorry Harry."

"It's been a while," Harry replied. "So is she a witch?"

"Naturally, how could my little sister be anything but?" Hermione laughed. "She's top of her class, naturally, and a huge Cardinals fan."

"Cardinals?"

"It's the St. Louis baseball team. She's lived there most of her life and you can't live there and not bleed Cardinal red. I take her to the games whenever I can. I actually like them. Can you believe it?"

"She's adorable, Hermione."

"Thanks. Her big Sis thinks so too. Anyway, she's all excited about what will happen when I get back."

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Well, she's finished the Second Grade. Here - and in Australia - magical education begins at six and not eleven. The first two years that teach control techniques, some theory, some history and the basics of preparing potions ingredients. Of course its about preparation technique, they don't actually prepare real ingredients."

"Of course."

"Well, when I get home, Mum and I will take her to Soulard to buy her first wand."

"Soulard?"

"It's a really old neighborhood in St. Louis. It's where their equivalent of Diagon Alley is located."

"Oh."

"Here, children get their wands at age eight, you know."

Harry nodded. "I know you're not being patronizing, Hermione, but I am very familiar with the American and Australian educational systems."

"Oh, sorry," Hermione began. "You are?"

"For now, we'll say it's a hobby of mine."

"For now?"

Harry nodded. "You're life for now, please? I've missed seven years, you know."

"Well," Hermione gasped. "Umm. Well?"

"Well, we left off with you finding your family in Perth. Yet I'm guessing you moved here not long afterwards?"

Hermione nodded.

"How did that happen?"

MONDAY - AUGUST 30, 1999 - WILKENS' RESIDENCE,
SHOALWATER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Daphne was asleep and Hermione and her mother had finished their supper. They were now in the sunroom sipping lemonade and talking. Hermione had just finished telling her mother about her

search for her family, sparing only a few painful details that were not directly relevant to the tale.

"So," her mother said, "now that you've found us, what's your plan?"

"Plan?" Hermione asked. "I don't understand."

"You going to drag me back to Britain?"

"Drag you? No. I'm not even going to ask you to go back."

"Good, because I'm not going there."

"No?"

"Not for all the tea in China."

"I don't blame you," Hermione agreed.

"Why do you say that?" Her mother asked in genuine surprise. "Are you not going back?"

Hermione shrugged. "I will if that's the only option I have. Otherwise, no."

"Why?"

"It's complicated."

"So?" Her mother was trying to get her to talk. There were some things Hermione was not yet willing to reveal.

Hermione sighed after a long pause. "Had that stupid war never happened, well, we wouldn't be here. But I would not have learned how messed up my life was back there. Even if I had a perfect life, it would have been messed up. If you had the choice mother, would you have raised me there or here?"

"Here. There are far more opportunities for a smart girl like you here than in Britain. And not just here: Canada, the United States. Over there, your kind considered us an afterthought. Even your friends the Weasleys looked down their noses at us, just not as obviously as others. Here, magical folk are not so high and mighty. By having

a magical child, we are a part of the magical world. They don't try and steal our children away from us like they do there."

Hermione nodded. "I wish I had been born here," she said softly.

"So do I Love. Just after the charm lifted and before your father dictated his letter, we talked about it. If we had known then what we know now, once we realized you were magical, we would have moved here or to America."

Hermione nodded but still asked: "Why?"

"You are our daughter and we are your parents. Parents do what is best for their children - at least the good ones do. We tried to do what was best for you but..."

"But?"

"But we were not provided with all the information. Your magical friends never told us that there was a better deal out there for you. Britain was the best place to be, Hogwarts the best school. Rubbish! The magical schools here and in the Americas are at least as good, if not better. Tell me Hermione, are you going to University?"

"There is no university for my kind."

"Not in Britain."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"Well, you'd have to take an intensive course in non-magical studies: math, sciences, history, literature. You could probably avoid languages as you are fluent in French. But then you could sit for your college boards and attend university and get a degree in magic or non magic studies. You are smart enough, dear. I always thought stopping your formal education at eighteen was stupid. Then, I read an article - banned in Britain of course, even after the war - it was illuminating. You might know the author..."

She handed Hermione a slick looking magazine. At once Hermione knew it was magical (the pictures moved) and it as from Britain. She knew the publisher and his daughter personally. It was the October 1998 Edition of The Quibbler. The headline read: Why Britain and

Western Europe Are The Laughingstock of the Magical World.
Hermione read further: A Critique of British Magical Society, Law and Education by Harry James Potter.

Hermione began to turn the page and her mother took the magazine away. "We're talking now, remember?"

"Sorry Mum."

"You can read it later, okay?"

"Habit."

"And it can be an annoying one at times. But, the fact that you loved learning always made your father and I proud. Still..."

"Sorry. Is the author?"

"As far as I know. Of course, when our Magical Mentor gave us this article we were still under your charm, so we had no idea who this Harry Potter was or that you are his friend."

Hermione nodded.

"His theory of what Britain was doing was shocking to us," Hermione's mother said. "They made it a point to so separate themselves from the rest of the world that...well. Even in peace, they set things up so that by the time you left Hogwarts, you would not really want anything to do with your Dad and me."

"Mother I..."

"Don't try and deny it, Hermione! I hope you never wanted that, but you have been drifting away from us from practically the moment you started school. You..."

"Mum, that was never my intent."

"I know. Later read that article. It was not your intent, but it was theirs. Their system was designed so that one day, they hoped, you would want nothing to do with me or your father."

"Mum," Hermione began to protest. "Sorry. A couple of months ago I would have said you were paranoid. Harry told me that he thought this was the case. I - well I wasn't so sure. Since coming to Australia, however, I see that you are probably right although I don't know why."

"I think Harry does," her mother said. "But that's for later. We were talking. Why don't you want to go back?"

"I was engaged."

"Engaged? As in to be married?"

Hermione nodded.

"To Harry?"

"Harry?"

"Practically from the day you first wrote us about Harry, we thought..."

"Oh God I wish now," Hermione wailed! "I should have seen it! God damn it! I-If H-Harry and I... But that's not what h-happened. H-H-He f-fell in love with someone else. I thought I was in love with someone else. I n-n-now know I was wrong about - about th-that. If - if it h-had b-been Harry, I'd be here to invite you to the wedding and then be on the first plane back to Britain, even after all I have learned. BUT NO!"

"Hermione?"

"I was engaged to Ron."

"Ron? Ron Weasley?"

Hermione nodded.

"He's a git! You always said so."

"Tell me about it. Okay, so he is a friend. I liked needling him. But..."

"How?"

"The war had ended, Mum. People were getting married or engaged left to right. Ron asked - Harry didn't, so I said..."

"Yes?"

Hermione nodded.

"So what happened?"

"He was cheating on me."

"No!"

"Oh yes! Bastard was shagging an old flame, he was. I went back to school and he took up with her - and others apparently - Git cheated on her as well - small comfort that - so then I come home. Caught him and his main mistress going at it, I did!"

"Hermione, I am so sorry."

"Bastard never missed a stroke! So I dumped him. Harry took me in and gave me a place to stay until my flight here. He kept Ron away. Ron was desperate to try and get me back because he had gotten his shag pregnant. He only wanted me back to avoid having to marry her, Mum. Harry! Oh God now I wish! But Harry is engaged to someone else and I will not..."

"I understand," her mother said sadly.

"What ever happened to happily ever after, Mum?"

"That's Disney, Dear. Real life is finding happiness where and when you can and if you are lucky, it may last a lifetime. It did for me, just not mine. But my two daughters are still alive and I am happy that I am still their Mum, Dear."

"Still..."

"No, Love! I lost the man of my dreams to cancer! I lost him. But we had wonderful years together. And we had you and we had Daphne. Yes, I would love it if he was not buried, if he was here with us now. I would have loved that. But every day I wake up and think of the

time we did have together and now you're here as well. How can I say there is not a happily ever after? My life is not the perfect life I envisioned when I was your age. But I have no real complaints. None. My daughters are testament to the fact that I have nothing to complain about and it is for you and Daphne that I can move on. Your Daddy and I love you, Darling! We always have and always will."

Hermione began to cry again.

"There, there dear, it's okay," her mother said soothingly.

"Mummy?"

"There, there."

"W-what now?"

"Well, my brightest witch of her age, as I see it you have choices."

"I - I do?"

"Oh, indeed. You can go back to Britain..."

"I - I can't. Only - only one reason to. Can't go back just to be Harry's friend. C-can do that f-from anywhere, really. It's - it's not worth it."

"Or," her mother said, "you can stay in Australia."

"I I-like it here."

"Or, you can come with Daphne and me to America."

"America?"

"Yes. We're moving there next week. You almost missed us, really. Just after Daphne was born and we learned she was a witch, your father and I were at a dental convention in Melbourne. We met a young couple there - well young by our standards. They were dentists from America: Roger and Violet Parsons. Turns out they are also magical. They have a practice in St. Louis and we got along famously. They came back when your father got sick and again for the funeral. They offered me a chance to join their practice. Daphne

- she was the reason I accepted. I would probably have moved anyway. Your father's death took all the happy memories of this place we had and made them hard. But Daphne's future may be better in America than here. I would have done that for you, Hermione, had I known. I must do that for her."

"You would have?"

"Of course."

"And me?"

"When your charm broke I did a little research. There is still the chance for you to go on to university, if you want. Hard work to get there, to be sure. You've missed years of schooling, but..."

"I never thought about that, Mum - well not since... I'd like that chance."

"I've hoped and prayed that you would. So?"

"Can I? You don't mind?"

"You're my daughter, girl. Why would I mind?"

Hermione nodded. "America it is then, though Amanda - my roommate in Sydney - will give me grief about not being a volunteer for the 2000 Olympics like we planned, I am sure she'll understand."

"St. Louis, look out! The Grangers are coming!"

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"So did you?" Harry asked.

"Did I what?"

"Go on to university?"

"Not right away," Hermione said. "Mum and Daph and I moved to St. Louis in early September of '99. I was enrolled immediately in a remedial course offered by the American Board of Magical Education for N.E.W.T. or similar level student immigrants. It was a

course designed to catch us up in non-magical studies. Far be it for me not to put forth my best effort. Based on my N.E.W.T. scores, I had a provisional acceptance to St. Louis University. I still had to pass the American college entrance exams - the S.A.T. with acceptable scores. All college applicants in the country have to take either that test or another called the A.C.T. I took my exam in May of 2000 and scored really well."

"No surprise."

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"Hard tests have never fazed the great Hermione Granger, is all."

Hermione laughed in appreciation of the compliment. "Thanks, Harry. It was hard though."

"Don't doubt it for a moment," he replied. "Did you go to college?"

Hermione nodded. "I started at St. Louis University in August 2000. I double majored in Applied Magical Theory and Business Administration and minored in History. History was fun by the way. Anyway, thanks to summer school - I attended class year round - in May 2003 I graduated. I was Summa Cum Laude - top of my class in Applied Magical Theory and, to my own amazement considering I had not been to non-magical school in years, Magna Cum Laude in Business Administration. Both degrees could allow me to study on for a Masters or Doctoral degree. But I got an offer from Pak Riley and could not pass it up and now here we are."

"Indeed," Harry said. "I want you to know, 'Mione, I am proud of you. Took guts - and effort and..."

"And, taking classes at night, I just finished a Masters Degree in History."

"Why?"

"Harry! You know how much I love books and such."

Harry nodded.

"And Daphne and the others need a role model, I think."

Harry wondered what she meant by others, but nodded.

"In Britain I was a second class subject at birth. As you yourself have written, the magical woman in Britain was - or still is - expected to be no more than a sperm repository and baby factory for the males. Basically, I was being groomed by magical society to be a baby factory - or at least producer.

"Harry, I will admit that only we women can do that and I myself have no issue with being a mother, but to limit myself?"

"You shouldn't," Harry replied. "I've had more than a fair few bad dates since my divorce. Hate being famous and, as you know, always have. But fame aside, it bugs me to no end that every witch I meet has no ambition greater than being Mrs. Rich and Famous. Every witch but one."

Hermione could not help but blush, hoping the one was her. It was, but Harry was not there yet...

CHAPTER SIX

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Hermione watched as Harry pulled out his wallet. "While we are on the subject of children..." He handed Hermione a picture of a little boy who looked just like Harry but without glasses.

"I thought you said you had no children," Hermione said.

"That's Teddy."

"Lupin?"

Harry nodded. "That's his I'm my Dad look."

"Dad?"

"His Gran died not long after I was married. I adopted him and I've been raising him ever since. That was another drama during the 'divorce.' Ginny wanted custody of him and if not that liberal visitation. She got neither. She never cared for him when we were married, so why would I let her? Besides, Teddy hated her. At the custody hearing he threw a right fit whenever she got near him. I regret it, but I was proud of him that day. Always have been. Like your Sis, tops in his class."

"You have a photo of what he really looks like?"

Harry handed her another one. The boy was sandy blonde haired with deep, blue eyes and an engaging smile. "He's wonderful, Harry."

"He's my boy," Harry said proudly. "He's made those years worth every minute! I may not be his real Dad, but I see him as my son. Children are amazing that way, aren't they?"

"Indeed." She looked at the photos of Harry's godson for a while. "Harry?"

"Yes?"

"Something you said has been bothering me."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..."

"Not like that. No, I just can't figure something out and it's driving me to distraction."

Harry laughed a little. "Yeah. Always did. So what did I say to kick your tremendous mind into overdrive?"

"Divorce."

"Really, what so hard to understand about that?"

"I - I didn't think it was possible in Britain."

"Don't be silly..."

"I mean, I know it's possible for non-magical couples and for a witch or wizard who was married to a non-magical spouse. I have heard of that. I just never heard of any witch and wizard getting divorced."

"I admit, it's not easy," Harry said. "Legally it is, but practically it's not. In my case, because Ginny 'tricked' me into the magical rite, divorce was not an option, hence the annulment. Still, everyone called it a 'divorce' even though legally it was not. As you can imagine my divorce was the big news of the day, not just that I asked for it but that it was actually granted. There had not been a divorce or annulment in a magical marriage in almost a century. What do you know about marriage law?"

"Not much, honestly."

Harry laughed.

"What's so funny?" Hermione asked.

"Fifteen years," he replied. "It took fifteen years for me to finally know something you did not."

"Harry!"

"Sorry, couldn't help it."

"Harry!"

"Sorry. I've spent years studying the subject. At first I was motivated by self interest, I admit. I began studying it not long after you and Ginny went back to school."

"Why?"

"Wanted to know what I was getting myself into. Later, I continued to study it to find a loophole that would get me out of that disaster I called my marriage to Ginny. Then after the divorce - although technically it was an annulment - I continued to study it as well as non-magical law because Magical Law was messed up and needed changing. I'm no solicitor, but I have become somewhat of an expert on British Magical Marriage Law and its numerous flaws. So, may I begin by asking you a question?"

"I suppose. What?"

"Do you know what a marriage is legally?"

Several years at university had taught Hermione not to guess. "No, not really."

"Legally a marriage is a contract between the husband and wife. Once the contract is entered into, each receives rights and obligations that they would not receive outside of marriage. More specifically, a marriage is legally about property rights."

"Property? That doesn't sound very romantic."

"There's nothing romantic about the law," Harry shrugged. "I promise to love, honor and cherish you, from this day forward until death do us part - part of the wedding vows, suggests the basis of the agreement and is probably what the couple and society expects, but is legally meaningless. Not loving your spouse is not grounds to end the contract."

"So long as the contract is in effect, what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine. By marrying, you get to inherit from me in the event of my untimely demise and vice versa. Not only that, but I can't disinherit you even if I wanted to - not completely at least. The surviving spouse is entitled to one third of the estate regardless of

what a Will might spell out. All property or wealth that is accumulated during marriage is shared equally between spouses without regard to who got it or why - although there is an exception for inheritances.

"But, it also cuts the other way. Right now, if I were in default on a loan, could my creditor take your money or property to repay the debt?"

"No, of course not."

"But, if we were married, you are as liable as I am for my debts and I am as liable as you are for yours. Marriage was always about money, Hermione. A long time ago, if you wanted to marry me - for example - your family would have to pay my family. No pay, no way. That used to be the law. It survives in the custom where the bride's parents pay for the wedding and her father gives her away. But, being cheap on the wedding does not invalidate the marriage. A long time ago, stiffing the groom's family on their dowry would invalidate the marriage."

"Why is this bothering me?"

"Because of the underlying meaning: women were property. When they were single, they were the property of their family. When they married, they became the property of their husband. Only when they outlived their husband and became what was then known as a dowager, did they become independent. Daughters were used to buy power and influence. They were offered up in marriage to give their family prestige or cement a political alliance. The wealthier the families were, the more likely the marriage had nothing to do with romance and everything to do with bloodlines and influence.

"Back in the day, if a single woman became pregnant, her family could sue the impregnator for damaging their property. The claim was called 'Seduction,' and it allowed her family to ask for and receive money for caring for the pregnant woman and her bastard child, for the loss of her labor because of the pregnancy and her need to care for the child and for her devaluation or depreciation in value as a potential bride as she had been deflowered and was less marketable."

"That's outrageous!"

"That was the law. The law was written by men for men, if you must know. Although a woman could also sue for certain losses as well."

"Such as?"

"Such as what happened to you, 'Mione. You were engaged and another woman stole your fiancé."

"That's not what happened."

"Didn't matter. You were engaged meaning you had a vested interest in your future husband. They called the claim 'Criminal Conversation,' and it allowed the victim to seek the benefit of the lost marriage - monetary benefit - from the seductress. Although most of the cases I was aware of where men suing over their lost women, the law did not make a distinction.

"Finally, there was the claim for 'Alienation of Affection.' That was a claim a married person could bring against his or her spouse's lover, provided the lovebird flew the coop. Those three claims no longer exist. They existed because when they were developed divorce was not an option and bastard children had no rights. Divorce became legal in non-magical Britain around the time of Henry VIII. The Heart Balm claims and absolute impairment of bastards were eliminated in the nineteenth century. The British Magical World was slow to adopt those changes. Divorce became legal in Magical Britain Marriage Reform Act of 1903, at least with regard to non-magical rite marriages. The 'Heart Balm' claims were abolished in the Civil Code Reform of 1933. And the caretaker of a child could demand support and inheritance from their natural parents in the Child Welfare Act of 1942.

"Prior to the legalization of divorce, a marriage could only be annulled. Most cases of annulment were based upon the fact that the wife was unable to bear a child - specifically an heir."

"What's this have to do with my question?" Hermione asked.

"I am erecting the canvas, as it were. Marriage law in both magical and non-magical Britain were not about love and family, but about the preservation of property rights and bloodlines."

"So that's where all that 'pureblood' nonsense came from?"

"I don't think so," Harry sighed, "but the Marriage laws certainly did not help change attitudes. So, how does the happy couple get married?"

"A wedding," Hermione replied. Harry's smile surprised her.

"For centuries, the majority of marriages occurred without any wedding at all," Harry continued. "There was something known as the 'Common Law Marriage.' If a man and women lived together as a couple for seven years and had children, they were deemed 'married' in the eyes of the law. It was a loophole in the law."

"Loophole?"

Harry nodded. "In both the magical and non-magical world, a wedding cost money, and I am not talking about the dress, reception, flowers and that stuff. For ages, you had to pay a tax to have a wedding and most couples could not afford the tax. Moreover, for centuries magical law refused to recognize as valid any wedding between a magical person and a non-magical person. The Common Law Marriage was the loophole that ultimately validated such unions. Typically, if such a couple did have a wedding, it was under non-magical law. Magical law no longer recognizes the Common Law Marriage.

"Why not?"

"Because the tax or fee is no longer prohibitive and may be waived upon a showing of hardship and because the Marriage Reform Act of 1903 recognized that any marriage between a man and a woman was valid without regard to their magical status or whether the wedding was performed under magical rite, non-magical law or by religious rite. Legally there is no distinction between the three kinds of weddings and, at least superficially, you probably would not notice much of a difference. In all three cases, the couple must apply for a Marriage License before they can get married. They must show they can legally get married. Once their license is approved, they appear before an official approved by the government: a cleric, justice of the peace or magical Binder. They exchange oaths and rings before witnesses and they are married. However, the magical rite is very different in its effect."

"How so?"

"Well, it's magical," Harry teased.

"I could have figured that out on my own," Hermione complained.
"What kind of magic?"

"If it works - and it usually does - very ancient and very powerful magic, 'Mione. The Binder cannot be anyone. Binders are trained in the Department of Mysteries. Although the world knows them as Marital Binders, they are really Unspeakables. They are taught nine spells and it takes years to master them all. Seven spells are used in the ritual."

Hermione's jaw dropped slightly. She knew that Unspeakables work with only the most powerful and potentially the most dangerous magic. If Binders were Unspeakables...

"The Ancient Magical Marriage Rite is thousands of years old. Each time the common language changes, the wisest of the wise must reword the ritual in the new vocabulary, grammar and syntax to ensure the new ritual is identical in effect to the old. Arguably, it would probably had been easier to stick with the original ancient Gaelic. But, it is necessary that the Bride and Groom understand every word spoken and every word they say."

"An incantation," Hermione replied!

"Exactly. The Binder usually begins the ceremony with some sort of spiel about marriage and family and - if he or she knows the couple - maybe a few anecdotes to help them relax. Once the formal rite begins, the couple says very little. Almost every word of meaning is spoken by the Binder for the rite is one long incantation.

"The formal rite begins when the Binder asks who presents the bride to be wed - although the Binder uses different words. From that point forward, every word spoken has meaning and is part of the incantation. However, the words may differ depending upon the age of the Bride or Groom."

"Excuse me?"

"The first spell the Binder will use is the Consent Spell. There is a masculine and a feminine of this this spell. The masculine is cast upon the Bride and the feminine upon the Groom. But the specific spell used - and incantation spoken - depends upon whether the Bride or Groom is of age."

"So the spell tells if they consent?" Hermione asked.

Harry shook his head. "No. It's called that because it occurs at the point in the rite where the Binder asks if the parties consent to the marriage. The spells do not tell if the consent is willing and knowing - the requirement, by the way - but if true consent is lacking, the spells won't work properly. If the Bride or Groom is not of age, the spells seek the consent from that person's parent or designated magical guardian."

"What do the spells do?"

"As I understand it, each of us has a magical shield. Our magic is our magic and nobody can use it against us or for themselves. There are those who believe there is an exception, however."

"An exception?"

Harry nodded. "It's called 'magical bonding.' While there are many who believe it exists, you would have no patience for it."

"Why not?"

"Because there is no real proof. Assuming it is real, it is also exceedingly rare. Course, that doesn't stop the magical romance novelists from making a big deal about it. Ginny was into those books. How Lance and Miranda magically bonded in school but were forced into arranged marriages by their evil parents and such. Still, the notion is out there that a witch and wizard might be so suited for each other magically that should they get together their barriers will fall and magically they will become one - and that one is greater than the sum of its parts. The magical rite tries to do just that and, if completed, succeeds to a point."

"To a point?"

"If the spell takes hold, the couple will be bound to one another for life. But the mythical bonding went far beyond just being bound. The mythical couple was far more powerful than they would have been before - magically speaking. They also tended to breed like rabbits. In the myth, birth control is not an option 'cause it won't work at all. The spell does not make birth control impossible."

"Do you think there's anything to that mythical bonding Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "On the one hand, I have not read of a single documented case of it nor any real evidence of it. On the other, it seems to be too big a deal to have absolutely no basis in fact. Why the complicated Binding ritual? Makes no sense, really. Especially when you consider that divorce was not an option for over a thousand years. Yet it is clear the intent was to create an artificial magical bonding or so it seems to me. I don't know..."

"So what did this spell casting do?" Hermione asked. "Why is it such a big deal?"

"If the spell takes hold," Harry began, "the couple will be happy so to speak. They will never and can never fall in love again - not with another. They will never think of leaving one another. On the surface, it seems like what one would want from a marriage."

"On the surface?"

"The vows, Hermione! One sided if you ask me. Though bonded for life, the husband can still cheat. He won't love the others, but he can still shag them. The wife cannot cheat - at least not with a man. The spell is designed to ensure she will bear her husband's child and no other. Her vow includes the word 'obey,' which is absent from his. If the spell takes, the husband's word is law. The wife's opinion does not matter and she loses the ability to care."

"That's outrageous," Hermione shot out!

Harry nodded. "I agree," he said softly. "If a couple truly loves each other, it is outrageous. I always saw marriage as a partnership. The husband and wife discussed things, set goals and work together achieved them. The spell made the husband the only opinion that mattered. The wife was, therefore, relegated to breeding stock as far as I can see. Took me a while, but I realized what was the point of

that? The Ginny I had hoped to marry did not deserve to be a mere servant to me, which is what I could have had if the spell had taken hold. You most certainly would have been a wasted life had you married Ron under the rite, don't you think? To think that your ideas would never come to light and you would support any boneheaded idea Ron had..."

"I take it you don't think much about magical rites," Hermione commented.

Harry shrugged. "Happy and even content marriages are a good thing, Hermione. They are good for the couple and certainly for their children. It's much healthier being raised by a couple who loves you and each other rather than in a broken home. I should know." Harry chuckled. "And I am not saying the rite does not work. There are some couples I know married under that rite who seem perfect with happy, children and all. Still. Assuming that magical bonding is real, then the rite is artificial. It's an illusion. Whatever utility it may have, whatever its benefits, morally it is still almost as repugnant as the Unbreakable Vow or the Imperius Curse for it robs the couple of their free will.

"Still I did agree to it. Ginny wanted it and I did want her to be happy. I did want our marriage to work. Honestly I did. I agreed to and underwent the rite knowing full well what I was getting into because I wanted what was best for Ginny. The problem was the spells never became binding."

"How was that possible?"

"I knew something was wrong within months of our wedding," Harry said, ignoring her question for now. "Other I know that have been married under the rite and, at least when they were together, they seemed genuinely happy. That's not to say the husband stops chasing after other women. But at home, they were the picture of the dutiful husband. As far as I knew, the couples seldom ever argue. But the rite is supposed to do that - make the couple see eye to eye on things and such.

"It was not like that with Ginny. I won't say we fought all the time, but it was more often than not we had a row about something. She hated my job and could not understand why I wanted to work at all. She hated that I did not wish to be part of the magical social set and

spend my time hosting parties. She hated what she called my foolish pursuit of useless philanthropic endeavors. And, about once a month or so, she go off at me about you."

"Me? What about me?"

"Ginny was convinced you were out there somewhere. She was certain you and I were having an affair, that the reason no one knew where you were was because you were a kept woman."

"That ridiculous! Mental!"

Harry nodded. "Gin was certain it was only a matter of time before you reappeared and stole me away from her forever."

"That's just..."

Harry nodded. "Until today, I thought her periodic 'Hermione Days,' as I thought of them, were tied to her female issues."

"PMS?"

Harry nodded. "But you told me you wrote me about once a month."

Hermione nodded.

"I now realize that she went off about you on Wednesdays - the day international post would arrive. She must have seen the letter and binned it, then waited for me to come home to accuse me of infidelity and anything else she could think of."

"Harry, I never meant..."

"I know, Hermione. It's not your fault I married an immature and insecure woman born with a double dose of the infamous Weasley temper. Needless to say, I was miserable. That was not what was supposed to happen. The rite was supposed to prevent just the kind of misery I was forced to endure. She might have believed otherwise, but I know Ginny was not happy either. Something was wrong, Hermione.

"It was about a year after we were married that I resumed my research into marriage law in general and the magical rite in

particular. I wanted to know what was wrong and whether it could be fixed. I still wanted us to work - Ginny and me. What I learned shocked me.

"The magical rite is not permanent really. It can be, but only if all conditions are met. If one condition is missing the spells will not take effect at all."

"What are those conditions?"

"I call them 'The Three Cs:' Consent, Casting and Consummation. If there was a flaw in any one of these the magical binding would fail. I tried to figure out which, if any of them, may have failed. As to Consent, it would be lacking if either of us had been forced or compelled into the marriage against our will. It would also be lacking if one of us was already married to someone else. Unfortunately Consent was not the problem. Neither could I see a defect in the Casting of the spells by the Binder. There may have been one, but not that I could see. That left Consummation. If the marriage was not consummated within two years, the spells would not take effect at all."

"Harry," Hermione said with a tone of disbelief, "I find it hard to believe that you and Ginny were not having sex after you got married, especially..." She then blushed.

"Especially after you and Ron walked in on us on her seventeenth birthday?"

"Now that was not my fault, Harry," Hermione protested. "That was Ron's brilliant idea! He thought it'd be fun to surprise his sister for her birthday. He thought you two were in different rooms! I told him it was a terrible idea! Told the git it was rude! Did he listen?"

Harry started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Hermione complained.

"Oh, nothing."

"Harry!"

"Okay. It's just that you reminded me just now of what happened after."

"After?"

"Ron and you barge in on us and there could be little doubt what I was doing to his little sister..."

"More like what she was doing to you, as I recall, Harry," Hermione said with another blush.

"Ron wanted to kill both of us," Harry replied, "but you put a shield between him and us and he as too enraged to figure out what to do about it. You then dragged him out of the room by his ear, as I recall."

Hermione chuckled.

"Needless to say, the interruption kind of spoiled the mood," Harry continued. "Ginny and I threw on some clothes and were getting set to come downstairs when we could clearly hear you yelling your head off at Ron. I particularly got a chuckle out of you saying to him 'What are you saying, Ronald? Do you want our first time to be in front of an audience? Want your Mum, Dad and brothers giving us tips as we try and do it?' I always wondered what that was about."

"The Git said it was his right and duty as a brother to barge in on you," Hermione confessed. "I was so embarrassed. It was your first time and Ron barged in on you and..."

"Relax, Hermione," Harry said. "Although maybe I could have been, I was not scarred for life. Besides, while it was our first day as lovers, it was more like our fourth or fifth time as I recall. Ginny proved to be very eager."

"Eew," Hermione squeaked, "I really don't want to know what you meant by that, Harry. So, if you two were having sex, how could there have been any issue with consummation?"

"Pity," Harry moped, "I was enjoying making you blush..."

"Harry!"

"Okay! Okay. Yes, that thought bothered me for a long time as well. I mean, the sex part was the last bit of our relationship to turn sour. I knew the spells had not worked, I had read about them and knew the signs of failure and we had just about all of them. I was pretty certain Consent was not an issue and had no reason to believe Casting was one. That left only Consummation, but we were having sex.

"It was about two years after we were married when I learned I had been mistaken about the definition of Consummation. Everyone thinks it's sex."

"It's not?"

Harry shook his head. "I found the legal definition looking for a way out of my bad marriage. That led me to an ancient work on the magical rite. Both defined consummation the same way. You see, consummation has nothing to do with sexual gratification and everything to do with procreation."

"So, a marriage is not consummated until the wife give's birth to a child?"

"Not exactly. Consummation is in between sex and a baby."

"Pregnancy," Hermione nodded.

"Exactly. When the bride becomes pregnant with her husband's child, the marriage is consummated legally and magically."

"And Ginny never got pregnant?"

"Nope. Refused, she did. It would ruin her career, she complained. She would look horrid in maternity robes. She'd never fit into her slinky cocktail dresses again. Her figure would be shot to all hell. She had all kinds of excuses. The most painful one for me was she could not stand little Teddy because he cried and could not take care of himself, so how could she stand other babies? I had no problem taking care of little Teddy. I will admit, feeding him the wrong food had really disgusting consequences and the smell or sight of poop is never pleasant, still. I really did not understand what her problem was with kids. Later, I guess I realized that if she had a baby, she would no longer be the pampered little princess she had

been from birth. Pathetic, really. Heartbreaking for me since I wanted a family. It was the one thing I had always wanted and never had and she thought that by being a Weasley-in-law, I should not complain. No, Hermione. I wanted my own family. She neither understood nor respected that."

"I am sorry, Harry."

"Don't be, Hermione. That was my loophole."

"What was?"

"Her failure to consummate broke the spell. Her refusal gave me the way out of what should have been a rock solid marriage. It was grounds for an annulment."

"Not a divorce?"

Harry shook his head. "A divorce admits the marriage was legal. The divorcing parties have property rights, and she would have had a right to half of my income earned during the marriage and half of the property I acquired. That was a lot of money anyway you look at it. A fortune, really.

"But an annulment says there was no marriage to begin with. The only issue there was whether I owed her half of the money she had earned during the marriage. That would have been around twenty thousand Galleons. But, since the Potter charitable donations over the same time period were far more than twice what she could have earned over her lifetime, and as they were deemed to have been from us, she was considered to have been already paid back. Boy was she pissed!"

"I can imagine," Hermione said darkly. "I never thought you could be so..."

"So what?"

"I don't know - cruel? Heartless? Selfish?"

"She and her solicitors wanted half of my estate, Hermione! I am worth over half a billion Pounds! She wanted half! I know she was poor when she agreed to marry me. Like I grew up eating from a

silver spoon? But, she had just negotiated one of the highest salaries for a Quidditch player in history, and she still moaned about her impoverished youth? She was earning more than ten times as much as the Minister for Magic himself! No. She pushed, and I pushed back. She tried to get George to dump me from his company! George refused and, according to George, she has never said a word to him since. It could have been amicable, but she and her Mum, I guess, got greedy. I am a persona non grata at the Burrow, although our split split her family as well. Ron and her Mum are squarely on her side and I have not heard from any of them since. George and Percy took my side and they and their families spend more time at my place than at the Burrow. Bill, Charlie and Arthur remained neutral and are welcome in both homes. It was a mess. Still is, but I gave up caring years ago, Hermione."

"Must have caused a scandal," Hermione commented dryly.

"Huge," Harry agreed. "Oddly, though, for once it seemed the press was on my side. Ginny was pilloried in the press. She was labeled the 'Ice Princess' by the Daily Prophet, at least until the Holyhead Harpies disclosed her new contract when she was labeled the 'Quidditch Bitch' or 'Quidditch Ice Princess .' Needless to say, she stopped getting invites to all of her formerly favorite social functions."

"Still Harry..."

"No! It was never about the money for me, Hermione! Never! I did not know about my wealth until after the War. I knew I had money in the bank, but I had no clue how much. Moreover, I knew nothing of my family legacy. Not long after the War ended, I learned. I learned I was now one of the wealthiest wizards in Britain and I learned what the Potter family had done with its wealth. I owned and still own practically half of Diagon Alley and goodness knows how many other properties, most all of which were earning rents. I've since acquired even more real estate. That, and my business investments means I make far more money than should be legal.

"But the Potters were never about accumulating wealth or flaunting it. Philanthropy is part of the family creed. From wealth societal change - that is the family motto. Potters were always pro-Muggle Borns. Married them whenever they could. You know, if it were not for the Potter Foundation, you would never have attended Hogwarts."

"WHAT?"

"It's true. Muggle Borns attended Hogwarts tuition free. Everyone else had to pay the twenty-thousand Pounds a year or qualify for a tuition waiver. Muggle Borns could never qualify for the waiver like the Weasleys did. Twenty thousand a year, could your parents have afforded that?"

"No," Hermione said weakly.

"A third of the school were Muggle Borns," Harry continued. "A third. All attended thanks to my family's fortune - although there were other contributors, such as the Longbottoms. Largely because of our largess, the Potters have a permanent seat on the Board of Governors, something that annoyed the Malfoy family to no end, I might add. Didn't know about that either until after the War either. It has proven useful."

"How so?"

"Long story."

"I don't have anything better to do today, Harry."

Harry sighed. "Not two weeks after the War ended, I bought a lot of properties. As you may recall, Grimmauld Place is a cul-de-sac of garden homes near Camden Town."

Hermione nodded.

"The Death Eaters staked out my place for months and had their fun with the neighbors. Killed a few, I'm told. Raped others. By the time the War ended, the properties had been abandoned and were up for sale, but there were no takers.

"We were expecting an influx of foreigners, mostly from America, Canada and Australia, to assist the Ministry for Magic. Law enforcement types, mostly. They needed places to live, so I bought up Grimmauld Place, renovated the properties and began letting them out to our new friends, and anyone else who could afford the rents.

"Our new friends had families and children and were not keen on our style of magical education. Fortunately there was also an abandoned school nearby. I bought it as well, had it renovated in September '98, it opened as the Severus School, the first magical primary school in Europe. It's curriculum is in the American style - magic and non-magic instruction beginning at age five. Wand training beginning in the 3rd Grade.

"When we opened, we took in students age six through eight to begin with. We also opened the school to any magical child in the greater London area - including Muggle Borns. We had volunteers go to their homes and begin a program similar to what you described for the new student families. More than just telling the parents their child was magical, but assisting them in assimilation.

"The Class of '01 - those who were first to finish and be eligible for Secondary School - that class had fifteen students. '02 had twenty. '03 twenty-four and '04 twenty-eight. Our most recent class that started - '11 - has thirty-five students.

"When our first class finished, we knew the British Secondary School system was not ready for them. They were eleven year olds who were Third-Year level at least by Hogwarts standards. There was a debate as to where to send them - a debate that had begun almost the same year they had. They were far ahead of their peers. We decided to initiate the American Style Secondary educational system. Their non-magical studies would continue, and their magical education would also continued into Secondary School. We debated where to send them. Kings College in London was the logical choice, but..."

"Kings College?"

"It's the regional magical Secondary School, Hermione."

"But I thought Hogwarts was..."

"The only school of its type in Britain?"

Hermione nodded. "England, at least. I had heard of one in Ireland."

"No. Hogwarts is one of three private schools of its type in Britain and it is the oldest school of its type in Europe. Plymouth Academy

near Plymouth and St. Patrick's near Dublin are the others. Then, there are eleven public schools, regional ones funded by the Ministry for Magic. There are two in Scotland, two more in Ireland, one in Wales and the rest, including Kings College are in England. Most Muggle Borns attend the public schools. The ones who attend Hogwarts are selected by lottery at age five."

"You mean, I was not destined to go there?"

Harry shrugged. "I like to think that you were, Hermione. But yes, there was a bit of luck involved. Odds were, you would have been invited to attend Kings College as your family lived in Loughton, Essex, the same District.

"Anyway, because I was on the Board of Governors, the Severus Class of '01 all went to Hogwarts, as has every other class since, so far. Hogwarts had ample facilities - it once housed and taught over a thousand students - centuries ago, mind you. They were not sorted into the existing houses, rather our Severus School students formed their own house - Potter House, they called it. They attended separate course from the others in their Year. They began with magical electives First Year. They got Hogsmeade Weekends every other week beginning First Year if family was visiting and were allowed out for the general weekends as well. They too compete for the House and Quidditch Cup, of course they did not win either at first.

"At the end of their Fourth Year, they took their Ordinary Wizarding Levels. As a group, they blew the doors off the exams. The worst student scored higher than any but the top five Fifth Years at Hogwarts."

"Sweet Merlin!"

"Indeed. This spring, they also took their non-magical GSCE exams. They scored well above the national average. The professors tell me that the second class of Severus School students will probably outperform the first class on this year's O.W.L.s. They basically are embarrassing the rest of the British Wizarding world. After last year, applications for the Severus School tripled and we are getting applications from all over Britain and Europe, for that matter. In the fall, we will be opening another school near Birmingham and a third

in Ireland to accommodate the new applicants. Those two will include boarding facilities for some of their students."

"You mean to tell me, if Mum and I moved back, Daphne and - well - Daphne could enjoy the same educational opportunities in Britain as she does in the U.S.?"

"I'd like to think so," Harry said. "Still need to work on the University bit. We have plans in the works and maybe, by the time Teddy and Daphne finish, there will be a magical University to attend. That's my plan, at any rate."

"And what is the Ministry's position on all this?"

"They left me alone, really. There were no laws regarding primary education, you know. All I needed to get for the students were exemptions from the restrictions on wand use and underage wizardry, which proved easier than I expected. After all, it was only a handful of children and it was not like the Ministry had to pay for any of it. Now, however, it's front page news. The Ministry is faced with a fait accompli, and the families are really bringing pressure to bear to open more schools and adopt the Potter House Secondary System for their children as well."

"How did you pull this off?"

"Money," Harry shrugged. "I have loads of it. I found that at least in certain circumstances, with money it is easier to bypass the government altogether than to try and go through channels. They let me do this because they did not have to pay for it and they thought I was mental. Now they are being asked questions as to why they have not tried something similar. It's been quite amusing, really."

"How so?"

"I am quite close with all of the Severus students. I've had them all over to the house, as they attend school a block away. I've visited them at Hogwarts several times during the year and teach them Defense lessons. I know them and their families really well. The press knows this and has accused me of trying to remake magical society. Guilty! I am. The Potter System, as it is called, is very pro-muggle and anti-blood status. The students are taught that blood status is nothing and those who believe otherwise are at best fools. I

try to do more, but it is with the next generation where I can make a difference without having to deal with the ingrained bureaucracy and attitudes. One day, I hope, another Voldemort will find Britain a hostile place for his ideas ... one day."

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"I am so proud of you!"

"Thanks. Part of me always thought you would approve."

"And Ginny?"

"Thought I was mental."

"Her loss."

CHAPTER SEVEN

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Harry sipped on his now cold cup of coffee for a moment. Hermione looked at him intently.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm."

"Can I be honest with you?"

"S-sure."

"Honestly, I don't know how to begin. I really did not expect to see you, you know."

"Makes two of us."

"Please Harry?"

"Sorry."

"I never thought I'd ever see you again, much less talk to you. But ever since I boarded that plane, a part of me feared that I would. I was worried that I had hurt you and that you would hate me for leaving. This is not at all what I expected."

"Had this been a few years ago," Harry said, "you would not have been far off. I never hated you. But I was hurt."

"Sorry Harry."

"Don't be. It took years of lying awake at night and years of therapy to realize some things. I was not hurt because you left, Hermione. I was not hurt because you never came back. I was hurt because I failed you and because I failed to give you a reason to come back."

Hermione was speechless.

"When you boarded that flight, as I watched you walk down the boarding ramp, I knew you were leaving and that you were probably

would not be coming back. I knew that hug and the 'goodbye' we said to each other was probably the last time I'd have you as a friend. I know you said you were coming back and if you were delayed you would write me and let me know. But part of me knew that was not going to happen. I was angry when that part proved to be right. I thought I was angry at you. I was wrong."

"Wrong?"

Harry nodded. "You had reasons to move away. What happened between you and Ron was a big one. I knew if your parents did not want to return, that was a big one as well. You had no real reason to return aside from the fact that you had lived your life here and I was your friend. Given the War, I believed your homeland alone was not enough. And as your friend, I failed to give you any other reason to return. I did not think that just being friends would be strong enough if your parents and family remained abroad. So I knew there was a good chance you were moving away, not just taking an extended holiday to find your parents.

"In a way I thought I understood. I really wanted to leave and start over somewhere else, somewhere where I was not the famous Harry Potter, somewhere where I could be normal. But I knew that would not happen. I was too well known. I would have been hounded. Even if I managed to change my identity, as I learned hunting criminals, sooner or later that ruse would fail. So I resigned to remain in Britain." Harry sighed.

"Did - did you miss me Harry?"

Harry nodded. "I always did, Hermione. I missed you every Holiday when we were in school and we were apart. I missed you those few times we had a falling out. I missed you when you went back for your final year, although I understood why you went back. I made it a point to see you every chance I could, even though it drove Ginny to distraction. She could not seem to understand that I wanted to see my best friend. She seemed to think it not possible for me to be friends with another girl. But I was, and I missed our times together. To be honest, I now think I missed you far more than I ever missed her. And I've missed you every day since you left, Hermione.

"Every night for the last seven years, I prayed you were safe and that you had found the life you deserved. Still, a part of me wanted to know that that was true." Harry did not notice Hermione's tears.

"When I got your first letter, I knew the likelihood of your returning had diminished."

"W-why?"

"Although you admitted that you were finding the search for your parents much harder than you had anticipated, you seemed so excited, so up beat, so full of hope. It was a side of you that I had not seen nearly enough of in years, not since before the Battle at the Department of Mysteries. You seemed so thrilled at being on your own, Hermione. I realized that was what you had truly been looking for - your own life. I knew you would only be happy if you had your own goals to achieve. I knew you could never have been happy with Ron, since he was not looking for a partner, but a housewife, something that would have destroyed you. You seemed to be finding yourself, and I knew that if you did, you probably would not return."

"Harry, when I wrote that letter I was still hoping to return. It was not until sometime later or so, certainly when my Mum told me she was moving to the States, that I finally decided not to. Even then, there was not one reason why I did not come back, but many." More than I have told you, she thought to herself.

"I figured as much," Harry said.

"So you have missed me?"

"Hermione, of course I have. You know? I wrote you at least one letter a month from not long after I received your first letter until just a few weeks ago?"

"You - you have?"

Harry nodded. "Of course, I had no idea if they would ever be delivered, but I've always carried them with me on business, just in case."

"You have them here?"

Harry nodded. "The first year's shortest. After that, I resigned that you were not coming back and 'Dear Hermione' became more like 'Dear Diary' in many ways. Want to read the first year or so?"

"Can I?"

"They were written for you, Hermione."

"S-sure."

Harry waved a wand and several pages appeared. Hermione began to read.

"Later, Hermione," Harry said. "I need to tell you something first."

"What?"

"Before I tell you, I feel I need to remind you of something."

"What?"

"You must understand that for almost ten years, right up until the day I first boarded the train to school - the day we first met - I had been unloved and friendless. I did not know what it was like to love someone or be loved in return. Like any child - any person - I wanted that. I wanted a mother and father and family and friends, but they were denied to me through no fault of my own. I wondered what I had done to deserve my fate. I wondered why God was punishing me.

"When I finally found out that I could have friends, that people could like me - even love me - I was not really prepared. I could not tell the difference between true friendship and true love. It took me years, and a failing marriage to figure that one out. A lot of what I am saying is in those letters at some point. But I promised myself years ago that if I met you before I could give you those letters, I would tell you."

"What, Harry?"

"I now know and have known for years that I was never in love with Ginny. Lust, for certain. I did like her. But not love. I could not love

her because my heart belonged to my best friend. I was in love with you, Hermione."

Hermione's mouth dropped.

"I was in love with you," Harry continued, "and I let you go, and let you go and let you go. You always came back. Always, until one day you did not."

"How did you let me go," she asked trying desperately not to cry, "when?"

"Do you remember when I first kissed you?"

She nodded.

"No, Hermione. I don't think you do. You couldn't. It was our second year. You were petrified in the Hospital Wing. I visited you every day," Harry chuckled. "Madam Pomphrey was getting sick of seeing me in the end. Every day, I came by and replaced the flowers by your bed and held your stone like hand and begged you to come back. Within a week or two, one day as I had to leave for class, I kissed you goodbye. It seemed so - well - so right. I kissed you hello and goodbye every day thereafter. Then you woke up and I - I stopped. I let you go.

"I let you go again when I failed to ask you to the Yule Ball Fourth Year. I wanted to. I was sure you'd say yes..."

"I would have, Harry," she replied softly.

Harry nodded. "I was too stupid to see that maybe I could be your best friend and be in love with you and maybe you could feel the same way about me at the same time. I was afraid that if I gave into my feelings, maybe things would not work and if they did not, I'd lose you. Better you as a friend than not at all. What a fool I was. Youth is overrated.

"Fifth Year you were always on my side, yet I kept you at a distance - same as just about everyone else.

"Sixth year, when Ron started going with Lavender? When I found you in that classroom, clearly upset? I was this close to kissing you!

Then, of course, Ron had to ruin it. You set those birds on him and I thought that meant you loved him and not me. I then thought I was falling for Ginny. I have since learned that she had been dosing me with a bit of Amorentia, the love or, more accurately, the lust potion. Learned that not long after our marriage was over.

"The next year, when Ron left us, I should have been more of a friend. I wanted to hold you and make all the pain go away, but I thought you were in love with Ron and that would not be right. I know Ron thought he was in love with you. Although I am to this day not sure if he really knows what love really is.

"Finally, there were our last two weeks together - the most wonderful two weeks of my life. And yet, while deep down I knew I was in love with you, I said nothing. I said worse than nothing. I let you get on that plane without telling you how much I knew I was going to miss you and how much I needed you in my life - and how much I loved you. I am sorry, Hermione. I really have made a mess of things, haven't I? But, now that I found you, I thought you should know that even today, you were the first thing I thought of when I woke up and you were my last thought when I went to sleep last night. It's been that way every day since you left. You deserve to know that, even if it changes nothing."

Hermione looked at Harry for a long time. Finally, she spoke in a quiet, almost terrified voice. "Harry, do you still love me?"

"I still love Hermione Granger," Harry said. "The beautiful, smart and caring young woman with the broken heart who boarded that plane. That was seven years ago. You still are beautiful - more beautiful than in my memory. You are still smart and caring. But I don't know you like I knew her and I'm not the same boy who was living in denial most of his life. I don't expect you to do anything with that information. I just had to let you know, if I could."

Hermione nodded. She was not ready to tell him everything yet. But there was something she had to tell him. She quietly pulled some new photographs from her purse. She then slid the new photos to Harry. Harry looked and saw a little boy and a little girl. The boy had very dark hair that was cut very short and deep green eyes, almost a spitting image of Harry at that age, but without glasses. The girl had blue eyes and long hair that was blonde and curly, although by no means as curly or bushy as Hermione's had been when she was

younger. The boy was practically a carbon copy of Harry except that he had Hermione's characteristic smile. The girl looked nothing like Harry, except for the lopsided grin he knew he had.

"That's my Harry and Luna," Hermione said. "They were born in St. Louis on March 22, 2000."

"They're wonderful," Harry said.

"They were another reason I could not return."

"Why?"

"They are your son and daughter, Harry."

Harry gasped and could not think at first. He knew, deep down, she had told him the truth. All he could do was stare at the two photos of two of the most beautiful children he had ever seen - two he had never seen. His children was the first thought he had. Their children was the second as he heard a cell phone ring and heard Hermione talking to someone. He was oblivious to what she was saying as his eyes began to water.

"Harry?" Her voice called to him.

He did not look at her. The two young faces were all he could see. He barely managed to nod.

"I have to go to the Front Desk for a bit. Do you want me to tell you about them?"

Harry nodded. More than anything, he thought.

"I'll be back," she said and he sensed her departure.

He should be furious with her, he thought. Two children - his children and she never bothered to tell him. He could understand if he had moved. But he lived in the same house he moved into after the War - over a year before Hermione went away. She knew where to find him yet she did not. He should be furious with her for hiding these two from him. Yet he was not. He was sad. He had missed six years of these wonderful lives and he would never get that time back. Did she tell him about them in one of the letters he never received?

Over the past several years Harry had spent a lot of time learning to think about his past objectively. He learned a lot about his youthful self and much of it was disappointing. He wondered how he would have handled this news even a few years ago and he knew. He would have hated her for doing this to him and even more for keeping it a secret from him. It would have destroyed his fantasy marriage and he would have blamed Hermione instead of the two guilty parties - Ginny and himself. Ginny would have hated him and Ron would have as well. He would have refused to see these children and would have wanted nothing to do with them - ever. And it was not their fault that they were born.

What a difference a few years make, Harry thought as he cried. Had she told me back then, the estrangement from the Weasleys would have happened sooner. But it happened anyway. Now he harbored not ill feelings towards Hermione at all. Not for leaving and not even for keeping this from him. She knew the damage it would have caused probably even better than he did at the time. And now he wanted to get to know his children, their children. The problem was how? She had a life here in America and for all Harry knew she was in a relationship. While he was not, he had a life in Britain. This was a nightmare, but in a bittersweet way.

Harry thought about seven years ago. He thought about when he was still best friends with Ron and Hermione and when he had acted as an intermediary in their disputes and when he still thought he loved Ginny. He thought about the two weeks from when Hermione and Ginny finished school and Hermione boarded that flight to Australia never to return.

Harry was certain Hermione had never lied to him. Not once in all the years they had known one another. If she could not or would not tell him the truth, she said nothing. She was and still seemed to be honest almost to a fault.

SATURDAY - JULY 10, 1999 - HEATHROW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, LONDON, U.K.

They did not say to much to one another on the drive to the airport, each lost in their own thoughts. Hermione was leaving for Australia to find her parents whom she had sent there into hiding over two years ago. Harry was also flying out today. His was business, a

mission in Italy and his flight to Rome was scheduled to depart two hours after Hermione's flight to Sydney.

Harry as thinking about everything that had happened recently and especially the last three days or nights rather. The night he had accidentally told Hermione about Ron's Lavender problem - as he now thought of Ron's unborn child - she had come to him. She should not have, but she did and he let her even though he knew it was a mistake and for all the wrong reasons. She gave him her virginity not for love, Harry thought, but to get even with Ron. Harry accepted that once in a lifetime gift not for love, but because his friend was hurting and he was angry with his future wife. It was a mistake, and one they would commit over and over again over the next three nights and mornings.

But, for some reason, it did not feel like a mistake. It felt right. It felt like they were meant to be together. That could not be possible. She was his best friend. They never loved each other like that. He was in love with Ginny, wasn't he? Still...

His flight was only a few gates down from hers and they waited for hers together. The gate was crowded, so much so that there were no seats for them. They stood and hugged each other for a long time. Hermione buried her face into his chest and he buried his in her beautiful brown hair. He loved the smell of her.

He could feel her shaking in his arms and knew she was crying quietly. He did not mind at all, because he was doing the same thing. He knew he would never forget this moment together. They broke their tight hug when the gate attendant announced that they would begin boarding her flight. They looked into each others tearing eyes and she refused to let him go just yet. They kissed. It was tender and it spoke of a farewell. Both seemed to want this kiss burned into each other's memory forever. The kiss lingered until her row was called to board.

"Thank you, Harry," she said softly. "Thank you for everything. Thank you for being my friend."

"Thank you, too, Hermione," he whispered back.

She gave him one last kiss then broke their embrace. He could see the tears return and felt his own as well.

"Goodbye, Harry," she sniffed as she gathered her carry on luggage and began to walk to the cue.

"Goodbye, Hermione," Harry said. "I wish you well."

"Thanks," she said. She walked to the cue looking back at him and smiling and waving as he waved back with tears in his eyes. I love you, Hermione, he thought but lacked the courage to say. He watched as she joined the cue and watched as she walked down the jet way to her flight. He watched until he could no longer see her at all. He knew. He knew she was leaving him forever.

He stood rooted on the spot. Absently, he watched as the other passengers boarded the flight. When the gate was empty, he walked up to the large windows and stared at the British Airways 747. He watched it as it pushed back from the gate. He watched as it turned and listened as its engines wound up. He watched as it began to move towards the taxiways. He kept watching it until it disappeared from view. He felt dead inside as he finally moved and walked off to the gate for his flight to Rome.

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, NY

Harry was slowly eating his now very cold breakfast, staring through his tears at the two photos of the two most beautiful children he never knew. He was surprised at them. He knew they were his and Hermione's. There were traits from each of them that were obvious to him. He was overwhelmed by the emotions he felt and wanted - he wanted them in his life.

"Harry?" Hermione's voice asked.

All he could do was nod to acknowledge he heard her. She looked at him intently. He should be mad at me about this, she thought. But he's not. I don't know how he feels, but I can tell he's not mad. Is he happy, sad, both?

"Harry, I know this is a bit of a shock but..."

"Tell me about them," Harry said tears evident in his voice. "Tell me about our babies."

Hermione was left momentarily speechless. "Our babies," echoed in her mind for a moment. Harry's tone told her he was both happy and sad at the same time. It was not the reaction she expected at all. Harry wanted to know about our children, she thought. It took her a moment to regain any sense of composure.

"I will, Harry. But I got a message to call home."

"The kids?" Harry asked in fear.

"I am sure they're fine," Hermione said. "If there was something wrong, the message would have been to come home, not call."

Harry could not help but sigh in relief.

"Besides," Hermione said, "you know me. Give me reading material, and I can't pass it up," she laughed placing her hands on Harry's letters. "And, oh by the way...." She waved her own wand and a large stack of papers appeared before Harry.

"What's this?" He asked.

"I made copies of every letter I wrote to you," she said. "You know me, little miss thorough! I made copies so that I would not repeat myself too much. I wanted each letter to be new and not say the same stuff over and over again."

"And you kept them?"

Hermione nodded. "They remind me of you, Harry. They were all I really had of you at least until our children arrived. I always keep them with me. When I read them, I remember our times together like it had just happened. I keep them because they help me tell our children about the wonderful Daddy they have. I thought you had seen them, but seeing as you didn't - have a good read."

"Hermione?" Harry pleaded.

She looked at her watch. "I'm not going to leave, Harry. Just kip up to my room, call home and read some of your letters. Meet me back here at five?"

Harry nodded. Hermione stood, kissed Harry on the cheek and walked away to her room.

I still love her, Harry thought to himself.

LATER

She was amazed she made it back to her room without losing it. Meeting Harry after all these years was a total shock and then learning he did not hate her and had loved her and all, well she was amazed she could walk, honestly. When she closed the door to her room behind her, she lost it. She did not know what she was feeling. Joy? Pain? Heartbreak? Confusion? All at the same time? Whatever it was, it crushed her and she leaned her back against the door and slowly sank to the floor as the tears flowed without restraint. An argument raged in her head.

What the hell just happened? I haven't seen him in almost seven years! Why do I feel like this just 'cause we bumped into each other on a business trip?

Because you still love him, she answered herself back.

Nonsense. I haven't seen him in seven years!

And yet from the day you left until last night you still dream of him. Every night you still pray that he was happy even when you were not. You still pray you did the right thing for him and his happiness by not coming back and not telling him about his children.

It wasn't like that! I had nothing to go home to!

You're right, in a way. You didn't. But, you also did not TRY to have something to go home to. You let him let you go. You heard him. He said he let you go. Did you ever tell him just how much he really meant to you?

I did in the letters he never got!

Before you left?

No. I couldn't.

You wouldn't. You were confused and afraid. You felt you thought you loved Ron romantically. You thought he loved Ginny that way. When Ron cheated you were not about to throw yourself at Harry and try to win him even though you now know you should have.

I did throw myself at him!

FOR THREE NIGHTS! You gave him no reason to believe it was more than just a temporary thing. No reason to believe you wanted him forever. What if you had? What if when he said it was a mistake, you had disagreed? What if you said you would come back only if he wanted you to - and not just as a friend? What if you had told him then - before you left that life behind - what if you told him then how you really felt?

I don't know.

Think Hermione! When did you first fall in love with him?

I don't know.

You do!

I never had a crush on him, not really.

You never needed to and you know that. When?

The day we first met on the train to school when we were eleven.

And why was that? Why did you fall in love with him?

He was the first person, aside from my parents, who saw me! He did not see the smart, studious, awkward bookworm. He did not see the front I had put up since I started school. He did not make fun of me or criticize my bushy hair or my teeth or anything about me. He was not intimidated by me or envious of me. He saw or could sense that deep down I was a terrified girl fearing more rejection and longing for a friend. He was the first real friend I ever had. That had been all I had wanted, but he was the first.

And why was that, Hermione?

Because I was his first friend?

Surely.

And I loved him for it.

He was the first and arguably only who truly accepted you for who you are. He wanted nothing from you...

Except help on homework...

He was no slouch there, Hermione. You know that. Ron was the slacker and Harry was willing to tag along. You know, though. You checked! He was second best in your year in Gryffindor...

To me...

And not because of you - seventh best in the entire class! You would have helped him anyway, but he really did not need as much help as you gave him. You helped Ron because he was lazy and needed it. You helped Harry because you loved him.

I know.

And yet you let him go just as he said he did with you.

I ...

Admit it, you did! You did not want to ruin your friendship with romance - or a failed romance really.

I couldn't lose him!

And yet you did.

I know.

You lost him and yet you have borne his children.

I know.

And don't think that was a mistake! You know the mistake was not that in your last three days together you slept with him. You know the mistake was not the fact that he is the only man you ever slept

with! You know the mistake WAS that you didn't do anything about it and just left.

I had to!

You're too fucking selfless when it comes to Harry and you know it. You'd rather he be happy with someone else than with you. You're afraid you can't make him happy. You're afraid to love him.

I know.

Damn it now, why? He's obviously NOT happy. He's no longer with Ginny and Ron is a distant memory! He's not even seeing anyone apparently. Are you going to do SOMETHING? Do you still love him?

I do.

Then DO something!

What?

ANYTHING! Get him back!

I told him about his children...

A start.

But, how? I have my life! My children were born and raised here. My life is here. Our life is here! His is there. For us to get together, one of us will have to give up their life.

That's nonsense. One of us will have to give up our job. One of us will have to move. But if this is real, we are finding our life not giving it up.

But my babies! They love their life. They have friends - something neither of us had at their age. Do I uproot them?

They are young. They will adapt and you know it.

Maybe...

Maybe he'll...

Don't be silly! Harry will never leave Britain.

He might for you.

But I would never ask that of him.

He might for his children.

This is hopeless.

Is it? Is it really? If you make this work, would you go home?

Hermione thought about it for a long while as she cried. In the end there was only one answer: YES!

Good girl.

Or...

What?

Well, I can't leave Mum! I can't leave Daphne! They're the only family I have. She's been like an older sis to Harry and Luna. I can't tear the family apart.

Your Mum would understand.

What about Daphne.

She would in time.

I can't.

Girl, think about it. This is your shot at happiness.

I know.

Don't throw it away.

I...

If this is right, and you know it is, it will work itself out. I'm not suggesting you move back right away. You and Harry have things to work out. Might be months before you can consider moving...

And I will not move in the middle of the fall semester.

Nor should you. You two have waited this long. What's a few more months?

And my job?

You can get any job you want and you know it. Besides, who knows?

What's that mean?

The boss did say that if you make a splash at this convention, particularly with the Brits and Europeans, they may want to open an office across the Pond. You know what that was supposed to mean!

An office in London, I know.

With you in charge, Hermione!

I KNOW!

Think about it.

I am not going to use Harry to...

You really think that when this convention starts he's going to be that unprofessional just 'cause you're here and a vendor?

I...

You KNOW him!

I knew him!

He has NEVER thought with his dick! You know that! He practically told you that. He is not going to recommend your company just because you are the rep. He will recommend it if it has merit.

It does.

I know, but let him make that decision for himself.

So you're saying I should not shag him?

You want to?

Please!

Okay, dumb question. He's the only one on the face of this planet and all.

Exactly. But I will not sleep with him to get...

He won't see it that way.

He won't, but others might.

So talk to him about it. He's smart. If he likes the company, he'll figure a way around any apparent emotional entanglement with its rep.

I will need to make sure. But this is nonsense. All this assumes that we actually will get romantically involved again.

Something tells me that is far more likely than unlikely.

Me too.

Besides...

Besides, I would love to be able to go home and tell Harry and Luna I finally found their Daddy.

They would love that.

They will miss baseball.

Internet, dear.

Not the same.

You could always take a vacation to St. Louis in the summer to take them to a few games.

Now there's an idea. But now we really are getting ahead of ourselves. What if he does not meet me today?

He will.

But what if he doesn't.

Let's not worry about that just yet.

But...

Call home and then read the letters.

One step at a time.

Exactly! Now call home, like you promised.

God I hate getting into arguments with myself!

Only because you always lose!

Hermione shrugged. She wiped the tears from her eyes, took a few deep breaths to pull herself together and dialed her home phone number on her cell phone.

"Hello?" A young girl's voice answered.

"Hey Daph," Hermione replied.

"Janie," her sister squealed! To the post-Britain world, everyone, including her sister and mother, called her "Jane" or "Janie."

"How's New York?" Daphne asked.

"Haven't seen much, I'm afraid. It was raining yesterday and this morning," Hermione replied. "Is Mum there? I got several messages to call."

"She's around," Daphne replied. "MOMMY? JANIE'S ON THE PHONE!"

Hermione wondered just how well her kids would adapt to Britain. Her sis, born in Australia, was fully "Americanized," she thought. Her own children were born in America. They called her Mommy, not the British Mummy or Mum. She remembered a year or so ago when she told them about differences in how British said things. They giggled when she told them about Lorries (trucks), Boots (trunks) and Mummys. "Why would anyone call their Mom a Mummy," Daphne had asked? "Mom's aren't all in bandages there, are they?" It had been around Halloween, Hermione remembered. She thought about it. Harry was probably right. She too might pass for an American were she to return to Britain. She had taken to the same colloquialisms and had, she only now had noticed, lost her British accent to a large degree.

"Janie?" a new voice said.

"Anything wrong?"

"No Dear."

"Then why the apparent panic? Front Desk, voice mail, all begging I call as soon as possible?"

"Er..."

"Mother!"

"Well, I was thinking, you know. I am on vacation. I've always wanted to see New York. So..."

"Mother?"

"We're packing as we speak! We have a flight on Southwest Airlines to New York. We've got adjoining rooms at your hotel. I thought I could take the kids sightseeing while you do your conference thing during days and we could spend evenings together. Oh, and I got six tickets to tomorrow afternoon's Yankees game."

"The kids are Cardinals fans!"

"Yeah, but Daph thinks Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez are dreamy, so... The seats are right behind the 1st Base Dugout and..."

Hermione sighed. "When are you getting in?"

"Should be at the hotel by 9:00 your time. Janie?"

"Yes?"

"Is there a problem?"

"No. No problem at all."

"I thought you'd be thrilled."

"I..."

"Janie," her mother insisted.

"It's just that..."

"Don't tell me you met someone."

Hermione nodded, forgetting her Mum could not see her.

"Janie?"

"You'll never guess who I met at breakfast this morning," Hermione said.

"Donald Trump?"

"Harry."

"Harry," her Mum whispered back? "Harry Potter?"

"Uh-Huh."

"And?"

"And, he's divorced - well that's not totally true. He got an annulment."

"Church annulment?"

"Magical."

"I didn't know you could do that."

"Neither did I."

"How?"

"Wife didn't want kids apparently. That means the marriage never happened."

"It also means, Dear, that as far as the Church is concerned, he never was married either."

"Really?"

"Defect as to form - his marriage was not 'sacramental' or equivalent and, refusing to want children is another basis. So?"

"So, he - uh - he told me that he loved me."

"He didn't!"

"He did. I got the impression he may still."

"Perhaps we should not come."

"No! I told him about the children. I can tell he wants to meet them. Mum, I don't know if this is going anywhere - I hope it will - but the kids should meet him."

"Do you still love him?"

"Yes," Hermione said softly. "Yes I do."

"How's this going to work, Janie?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want us to come?"

"I - I - yes. He should meet..."

"I understand."

"I'll try to meet you in the Atrium when you arrive, but..."

"I understand, love."

"Mum?"

"Yes Dear?"

"What do you think?"

"After all the talks we had? You'd be a fool not to try, Janie. I can't say if it's a true love match. I don't know. But if it is, you should."

"Thanks, Mum."

"Good luck!"

"Mum?"

"Hmmm?"

"Don't tell the young ones. I want it to be a surprise."

"Wouldn't dream of it, Dear."

"Thanks."

"Mione?" It was the first time her Mum had called her that in years.

"Yes?"

"Well... You know we never really met him. We saw him once, years and years ago when you were twelve or thirteen. What's he like?"

"He's ... what do you mean?"

"I mean, is he good looking?"

"I think Daph may forget about Jeter and all, Mum."

She heard her Mum laugh. "Okay. See you in a few. Good luck!"

"Thanks."

CHAPTER EIGHT

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Hermione then picked up the first letter and began to read:

31 July 1999

Dear Hermione:

Well, it's my birthday. I am now, for the moment, as old as you are! Happy Birthday to me! I got your first letter this past Wednesday. I was sorry to hear that you think the search for your parents may take a long while, but I am not that surprised. From what you told me, you made them hard to find. I am as hopeful as you are that because they are so hard to find they are safe and you will soon be with them again. Aside from that, you really sounded great! Until your letter, I had totally forgotten about the Olympics - they are really going to be held in Sydney? I told Ron about the Olympics (but not your letter), and he was not impressed. I really wonder about magical types! They are So out of touch!

Anyway, things have been busy here for me. My Italy mission went well as we bagged a few fugitives. I've started taking Teddy for weekends, at least when I'm around. While I admit that while changing nappies is disgusting, having the little tyke around is more enjoyable than I imagined! He's gotten SO BIG! Of course he takes after his Mum and can change aspects of his appearance at will. Can be both amusing and bloody annoying at times. For example, I take him to play in the park with other babies his age. He seems to know when I think play time is over and changes into some other baby to keep me from finding him. It is frustrating as hell, but I can't help but laugh in the end!

Ron told me the other day he's decided he should marry Lavender. He does like her, but I don't think he loves her. We'll see how this goes. They haven't set a date yet, but it's probably soon. Sorry. Ginny is still pissed at me for taking your side in this. Now this is the confusing bit and I wish you were here to explain this to me: she's also pissed at Ron for screwing around on you. Haven't heard from her in weeks.

I hope this letter finds you well one day. I know you probably won't be able to give me an address to send this to anytime soon. I have decided to write you every month to tell you what's going on back here and all. When you send me your address or come back, I will send you these letters.

I miss you. Good Parent Hunting!

With love,

Harry

1 September 1999

Dear Hermione:

Eight years ago today we first met. Remember?

Haven't heard from you since you told me all about your arrival in Australia. I assume you are busy hunting down your parents. Keep at it. I know you'll find them!

Now for the news from the Old Country:

Ginny joined the Holyhead Harpies as a Chaser. Never bothered to tell me, of course. I had to read about it in the paper. I don't know how I feel about that. She's a top notch player, still you'd think she'd tell me in advance. I would have supported her decision. Still. Then again, I was still on her list at the time. About a week after her signing was announced, she decided she was no longer pissed off at me. So we're back together and engaged again.

Ron married Lavender last Saturday. What a nightmare! I was Best Man. The Git got really, really, REALLY drunk at the reception. Poor Lavender - who's clearly preggers now - was left in tears. While I am not thrilled with WHY Ron had to marry her, she deserved a Wedding Night, don't you think? She was supposed to be happy, not bawling her eyes out because her Groom was an ass, right? Instead, Ron got sick in front of everyone and all over himself. From what I heard, he was out of it for two days or so. I hate to say it - especially after what he did to you - but I felt sorry for Lavender.

I pray I will get another letter from you soon, 'Mione. I do miss you, you know.

With Love,

Harry

19 September, 1999

Dear Hermione:

Happy Birthday! And I do hope it is a happy one for you! Once again, you are a year older than me! I hope you have found your family and that you write to me soon! Just wanted to wish you a Happy 20! I'll update you on things happening in my next letter! I miss you!

With Love.

Harry

30 September 1999

Dear Hermione:

Still haven't heard from you, but as the Aussies say 'no worries.' I figure you're still looking for your folks. Tracking people who are trying not to be found is tough work, even when you have the full resources of the government behind you. Then again, despite Kingsley as Minister, I still think the institutional corruption remains in full force. Something we need to fix - sooner rather than later.

Now for the news: Get this! Draco Malfoy has joined the Ministry as a junior prosecutor! He tried his first case last week before the Wizengamot. They assigned him to prosecute good old Dolores Umbridge. We Aurors had spent over a year building a case against her and when we thought we had enough to hang her, they - the Department of Law Enforcement - turn the case over to a known Death Eater and Umbridge crony? Needless to say, I was furious.

The oddest thing happened. Malfoy went after her like no one's business! He crucified her! The verdict came in, guilty on all counts!

She's been sentenced to 375 YEARS in prison without parole! Draco told me later that he had been assigned to the case to dump it and he refused to do so. The evidence against her was so overwhelming, he said, that to give her a pass was unthinkable! He's still a little shit, but damn if I don't admire his dedication to duty!

Draco asked after you, 'Mione. He misses his old 'sparing partner,' he said. I'm sorry, but I thought that was amusing.

I miss you and pray to hear from you soon, Dear.

With love.

Harry

31 October 1999

Dear Hermione:

Eight years ago today, we went from being friendly to best of friends! I still am waiting for your next letter. I hate to say it, but you must really have done a number on your parents if you haven't found them yet. Then again, why am I not surprised?

I was sitting here thinking and could just kick myself for being such a jerk! I never told you about what happened to my Cousin Dudley! How could I be so stupid! Well, he married a witch last October. Yes! My Cousin, son of the magic hating Dursleys, married a pureblood witch! Her name was Jena Diggory and she was in our year in Hufflepuff House. She was a First Cousin of Cedric, if you must know. When the War broke out, she went into hiding and was assigned by the Order to the same Safe House as my Cousin. Love at first sight, Big D (My Cousin) says, as does Jena.

When the Final Battle was joined, turns out Big D led the final assault! He was wounded KILLING one of the enemy's giants! Punched the big bastard in the knackers, he says - and there where plenty of witnesses. The giant fell on him and nearly killed him! So, in hospital he wakes up. Next to him is Lavender Brown, having been bitten by Greyback the Werewolf under a full moon! She was dying, Hermione!

Big D saved her life and, in the next couple of months, developed a cure for lycanthropy! He coupled magical and non-magical medical techniques and has since developed a vaccine! (He had worked at a hospital both before and during the time he was in hiding. It was somehow related to his school work.) Then they discovered, he was a 'Late Bloomer!' He is a wizard, 'Mione! His magic lay dormant until - until the Dementor attack! His latent magic held off the Dementor just long enough for me to deal with it!

Why do I tell you this? He's now Professor of 'Non-Magical Studies' at our school. This year, he has started the new course for Third Years. I think you would have enjoyed that course, although from what Big D tells me, while not magical, it's probably tougher than any course we took! He's teaching more than just Muggles from our perspective. He's teaching Muggle history, literature, mathematics and sciences! Way to go Big D!

Jena is pregnant with their first child and in due any day now! I have been named as the Godfather. Can you believe this? I can't!

I miss you, 'Mione!

Love, as always,

Harry

30 November 1999

Dear Hermione:

Again, not a letter. I hope things are going well for you. I do want you to find your parents and, even if you should decide to stay overseas, I do hope we can stay in touch. You are my best friend, you know. But, I know you are probably busy, so I won't get too critical of your lack of letters.

Wow! What a month!

Jena gave birth to twins on the 11th! A boy and a girl! They are named Harry (after me!) and Petunia (after my Aunt). I am both of their Godfathers! Big D is proud as punch and told me to top that one! I am really pleased for Dudley and Jena. Something tells me

Dud is going to be a good parent, unlike his father and Jena is not a doormat like my Aunt was. Oh...

I know I forget to tell you this. My Aunt and Uncle divorced just a couple months before Big D and Jena got married. I was Best Man, you should know. Good ol' Uncle Vernon lost it when he learned his only son was a 'freak' like me. Seems he was the issue in my life. Aunt Petunia and I get along now, although we still have a lot of baggage to deal with. Still. I've learned far more about my Mum over the last year and was surprised how much her older sister had admired her. Aunt 'Tuny' was crushed when my Mum got her Hogwarts letter it seems. Not because her sister and best friend was a witch. That was later. No. Aunt 'Tuny' was crushed because my Mum and her were being torn apart. Did you know my Aunt begged Dumbledore to come to Hogwarts? She begged to be hired on as a servant so she could be with my Mum? How cruel is our society for tearing a loving family apart?

Big D has started a swim class at Hogwarts. He was shocked that we magical types generally don't know how! It's going to be mandatory according to Headmistress McGonagall. After all, you might find yourself in water without the ability to use a wand, right? (Remember jumping off the dragon? I still cannot really swim!)

Thought you'd like to know, 'Mione. Miss you loads!

Love,

Harry

1 January 2000

Dear Hermione:

Just wanted to see if the World ended with that Y2K thing before I wrote. What a let down that was. Even Big D was a bit upset (had him and my family over for New Years. Gin was pissed, as per usual it seems.)

Well, I am now married! Gin and I tied the knot the Saturday before Christmas. It was a disaster!

Ron was the Best Man - or at least he was supposed to be. Git got passed out drunk at the Rehearsal Dinner. Not only was he in no condition to stand up for me at the Wedding, his wife went into labor while he slept off his drunk. Big-D stood in in his stead at the wedding, but poor Lavender! She gave birth - alone - to their daughter while he was face down in a toilet! What a GIT! But she got her payback! They were planning to name the girl Molly after Ron's Mum. She's named Gabrielle, after Fleur's Sis.

I don't know when or if Gin will ever forgive him for ruining our Wedding. Man was she upset! He tried to apologize the other day and it was all I could do to keep her from beating him to a pulp. I am worried about him, 'Mione! This isn't right, is it? Okay, I know he doesn't do this all the time, still! He did this at his wedding and now mine. Worse still - he has hurt Lavender. Fine! I know his dalliance with her hurt you, but does any woman deserve Ron? Hermione, I know you must hate her, but does she deserve this?

I really want to hear that you are okay. This has turned into a bad month for me, 'Mione. I do miss you!

Love.

Harry

31 January 2000

Dear Hermione:

Still no letter. Oh well. I really do want to hear from you, but you must still be on the move looking and such. Ron is still on Gin's shit list for the wedding, although she's busy now with pre-season training so I don't see her all that much. She's home one day a week for certain - it's in all the players' contract. Still, it's not like I am promised Wednesdays off! So much for a honeymoon!

It's been real busy at work. It seems that several cases broke open at once! We've been rounding up fugitives left and right, it seems. Still...

I was on overseas assignment with Ron last week. We were staking out a known Death Eater. We took turns monitoring the flat where he

was hiding. Ron missed his shift! Seems he was out shagging a local. Bastard had the audacity to brag about it. As I am the superior officer on assignment, I called him on the carpet for it. How dare he blow off his job for a piece of tail! I would not tolerate that from a bachelor! And this Git is married with a baby at home! The son of a bitch thought I was overreacting! Am I missing something?

The more I see, the more I am convinced dumping Ron was a good decision for you, Mione! I am so sorry about all of that, but...

I hope you find your parents soon and write me. Miss you, 'Mione! Honestly!

Love.

Harry

29 February 2000

Dear Hermione:

I have a confession to make this Leap Year. When you left for Australia, I felt there was a real possibility you might not return. Too much had happened over the last few years. I confess, I would have loved to join you and avoid being me for the rest of my life. I cannot see why anyone would want to be famous! It sucks! I cannot go to Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade without being hounded for autographs or pictures. Never mind the press!

Rita Skeeter just published her biography of me! What a load of shit! 90% of it is false. Sorry, but the bitch pissed me off. I hired a solicitor and we are set to sue her and her publisher for libel. I really don't care if I win a knut, so long as I show she's a right fraud.

You know, 'Mione? You are one of what the press calls 'The Golden Trio,' the trio what won the War. Yet, the papers here have been silent about you. Your engagement to Ron was front page stuff. Ron's marriage to Lavender - and the implied end to your engagement - was just above the Obituary section. Only a handful of us know you are overseas. I don't understand it, Hermione! You were a major player and yet they don't seem to know you have been

gone all these months! They really have their heads in a warm and smelly place!

A couple of weeks ago, Gin was home on her off Wednesday. I came home and absently wondered aloud whether a letter from you had arrived (international post is delivered on Wednesdays). Gin went mental on me! Told me I am not allowed to have ANY female friends! Can you believe that?

Last week, I had lunch with Luna who has just returned from a four month expedition up the Amazon River seeking out new magical creatures with her boyfriend - a herbologist from Austria. They discovered and have cataloged over sixty new species of plants and animals unknown to magical science. Hagrid has the live specimens. He's building a zoo behind the Dark Forest. That Dragon we released from Gringotts? It was the last of its kind. It's breed was thought hunt to extinction over a hundred years ago and is now healthy and on exhibit! Hagrid says he planning on a breeding colony of Welsh Greens to help repopulate the remote regions of Wales. The new head of the Department for Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures is fully endorsing Hagrid's conservation plan. Wow!

Anyway, I told Gin about my lunch with Luna and she went mental again! I hope she's pregnant (Ginny that is.) If this is not one of those women things (sorry) I don't know how I can take it. Luna's a friend! So are you! Why can't I have female friends?

I guess the 'Honeymoon' is over.

Sorry to be so down.

I miss you, 'Mione.

Love,

Harry

31 March 2000

Dear Hermione:

I confess that I now am forced to believe you made the decision I feared you would make when you boarded your flight to Australia. I confess, I fear you have decided not to return to England - ever. I can only hope that this decision is made because your new life is happier and more fulfilling for you than your life here. I pray that is true. I only wish - I only wish I could still hear from my best friend.

Lavender is pregnant again. I am sorry, Hermione. I know how you must hate hearing about her, but she is the only woman I can even talk to that Gin does not get mental about and she is in such need of a friend. She was married under the magical rite, if you must know, so she and I can be just friends. With Ron as a husband, she needs a friend! Merlin! If half of what she says is true, did we ever really know Ron?

Bad news this month. Dromy Tonks died suddenly of a stroke. I was seeing Teddy almost every weekend for months, now he's mine full time. I'm thinking of adopting him. No child should be an orphan as I was. Still. He's started to walk in the last few months and has become a real terror! Actually, we pretty much went from standing up to running. I'm not certain the boy knows how to actually WALK. I'd be pulling my hair out if not, deep down, I did not admire his audacity. He might give me a run for my money when he goes to Hogwarts, Mione! Unlike me, he'll be a natural born (as opposed to by fame attractive) heartbreaker! Of that I am certain. I never knew kids were so much of a challenge yet such a joy! I can't wait for Gin and I to add a few more!

Teddy's talking up a storm as well - well he only says a few words - he's not yet two, still. You know what his first word was? It was "Papa" which is what he calls me. Oddly, he knows "mama" but only uses that word when I show him a picture of his Mum. I've tried to get him to call Ginny that, but he refuses. He calls her "Inny" for now. Does that mean anything?

I wish you would write me and let me know you're okay. I pray one day this letter will find you well. I miss you and pray for you every night.

Love,

Harry

30 April 2000

Dear Hermione:

I am thinking of using these letters both to write to my best friend and to serve as a kind of journal. I now believe you are not coming back. I can understand why, yet wish the why was not real. It is hard to think I might never see you again, hear your voice or get yelled at for a silly idea. I do miss all of that, truly. I hope, one day, you will read these words and know how much I care about you.

Mushy part done!

Teddy had his second birthday on the 10th. Gave him his first real party. I had over some of his little friends from the neighborhood (and their parents) as well as the Weasleys and Dudley, Jena and the Twins. Given his inability to exercise restraint in self locomotion, I asked everyone NOT to buy him a training broom yet. I got him a football. Being able to run all the time is perfect for that sport. Also got him a basketball and put a kiddie hoop up out back by the carriage house - basketball is another running game. Ron, of course, chose to ignore my instructions and bought Teddy a training broom. Oh, and it seems Bill and Fleur's daughter, who's turns one in less than a fortnight seems to have taken a shine to Teddy - at least that's what Fleur thinks.

Fleur bought the only practical gift and I am grateful for it, although it may be a few months before it gets used. It's one of those training potty seats. I can't wait until the little tyke is trained and I don't have to change nappies anymore. (It gets WORSE as they get bigger, 'Mione!). It might be easier, but getting Ginny to take part in any of the child rearing seems to be like pulling teeth. I hate to sound like an insensitive male chauvinist - especially to you - but you'd think as a young woman she'd show a little interest, wouldn't you? Especially as he is part of this family. I don't know what to make of my wife at all!

Ginny's first full season has started. I see her maybe once a week now. It's mostly just me and Teddy at home. During the days and when I'm away on assignment, he stays with friends and family. I think he seems to understand, but he's only two now. Mostly, he stays at the Burrow when I am away. He seems to like it there, but I

am worried that I cannot be there for him all of the time. Still, he gets out and seems to get along with all of his babysitters. I am so proud of him! I formally adopted him a couple of weeks ago. Legally, now, Teddy is my son. I'm a Dad! Damn! I cannot tell you how great that makes me feel!

I hope and pray one day you will be a Mum. I know you'll be brilliant at it. Any child would be lucky to be yours, Mione. There is no greater thrill than having a child I've recently found. Yes, I do think I'm too young to be a Dad, but I love it so. (To my horror, Gin is not thrilled at all. As far as Teddy's concerned, he is less than a House Elf! I don't know what to make of that, 'Mione!)

Auror and Dad: busy, busy, busy! I do miss you!

Love,

Harry

31 May 2000

Dear Hermione:

What a bloody horrible month this has been, 'Mione! I had to fire Ron from the Auror Corps for 'Gross Deriliction of Duty.' Well, technically, Director Savage gave him the sack, but it was on my recommendation. God, I feel awful!

We were THIS close to nabbing Travers, the most notorious Death Eater still at large. We had him nailed down in Dubrovnic, Croatia. We just had to watch and wait. Ron decides to engage in his less savory overseas recreation (cheating on his wife) and bags a teenage girl. Brags about being the famous Auror and War Hero to his shag. It was Travers' daughter. Travers booked it before our assault team was ready. Ron's dick cost us a sure mark! Had to let him go.

How do I explain this to Lavender, 'Mione? How do I explain to her that her husband who she practically worships is Sir Shags-a-lot? Probably don't. But how do I explain that he's a useless git as an Auror - a war hero who sucks in peace time? God, I hope I don't have to, but she's a friend too so how can I avoid it.

Ginny's pissed at me again. I backstabbed Ron, she says. Ron's got a job at George's Company, but he's hourly, not upper management. I guess George doesn't trust Ron yet. Ginny blames me.

What a bloody nightmare this is!

I know you'd have an answer that makes sense, 'Mione. I do miss you so!

Love, as always,

Harry

30 June 2000

Dear Hermione:

Well, I hope one of us is happy, because I am not. Sorry, 'Mione, but there it is. Ginny is so thoroughly rotten to Teddy it makes me sick! Ron hates my guts. Neville is on assignment for six months in Argentina. Luna and her boyfriend are off in the Congo seeking new magical species. Molly Weasley will not forgive me for getting Ron fired. (It was necessary!) You're not here. All I have for friends are the last two people I would have thought of: Draco Malfoy and Lavender - and Lavender is far too curious for details about why her husband got the ax. I can't tell her he was fired for shagging the 16 year old daughter of our target and thus tipped off the bastard that we were coming for him! (Yes, she was 16! I thought that magical rite was supposed to make one faithful to their spouse! Apparently I was wrong!)

The second Annual Victory Ball was held this month. Finally, the topic of gossip shifted from my firing of Ron to something else, but the something else horrified me. For the first time since you left, your absence has become the topic of conversation. One third of the "Golden Trio" was conspicuously absent. Sorry, 'Mione, but I am afraid the press will soon be trying to hunt you down or (hopefully) publish rumors about what happened to you.

Sorry, but better the latter. You obviously want your privacy and don't need the Rita Skeeters of this world knocking on your door.

You left by Muggle means, 'Mione. That should throw them for a loop. Still. God I wish they would just leave us all alone!

I wish this were a happier letter, 'Mione. I really do. I pray you are happier! I do miss you!

Love,

Harry

10 July 2000

Dear Hermione:

A year ago today, you left on that flight to Australia. A year ago today, my life changed forever. Before, there was one person whom I could tell anything; one person who would listen and not judge, criticize, poke fun or offer unsolicited advice. A year ago, there was one person in my life whom I could trust absolutely, and whom I trusted absolutely. When your plane left, that one person was gone. Now, I have no one like that. I miss you, Hermione!

I know I wrote you only a few days ago. But I had been planning to write you on this day for some time. There are things I have been thinking about that I now know I need to tell you. I should have told you ages ago, but I was too stupid or scared to do so. No more. I had not planned to forward any news this day, but since my last letter things have happened that I need to tell you about and you need to know. I really wish I knew where to send this. I so need a friend like you right now!

Ginny and I had a huge fight the other day. In her rage, she hit Teddy. Not really hard, but still. I don't really think she did it on purpose, but that was too much. Teddy and I moved out that night. I am now living in a flat in Diagon Alley. I don't think this break is permanent, I don't want it to be, but that was too much from the Little Princess. I am afraid that if she begs forgiveness, I'll go home. Hopefully she'll grow up just a little.

We have not even been married a year, Hermione! Already this celebrity marriage is on the rocks and sinking fast. I want it to work, I do try, but I am not going to let her have her way on EVERYTHING!

She wants me to quit my job, she wants me to buy her a Manor home "befitting someone of [her] station." She wants me to put Teddy up for adoption because she has no use for children, she says. She told me she doesn't want any brats, doesn't want anything to interfere with her career or ruin her figure! Damn it, I want children! Why doesn't she love me? Why doesn't she know that neither of us can or should get our way. We're supposed to be a couple and that means that when we disagree on something important, we're supposed to work things out and compromise, right? I don't think she knows what the word means. (I'm so upset that I've started researching to see if there is a way I can end this nightmare!)

So, what started this row? An article about you in the paper, believe it or not. There was an article about you a few weeks ago just after the Victory Ball. It didn't say much, only that you were not there and that your friends believed you had gone to Australia. (I was not interviewed, thankfully. I think Ron told them about Australia.)

It seemed to reek of intrigue and maybe scandal. It suggested that you left for another man and left poor Ron all alone. Pathetic. But, it also inspired a certain reporter to dig further.

Rita Skeeter wrote a piece confirming that Hermione Granger boarded a flight to Australia via Singapore on July 10, 1999 about two weeks after she had a huge fight with Ronald Weasley. The article said you hit him and wondered why my office refused to hunt down a violent and powerful witch who had obviously "gone Dark." What Rubbish! Anyway, Rita continued and said that through her "connections" in Australia she learned that no Hermione Granger ever arrived in Australia. Later, she learned that Hermione Granger did not get off the plane in Singapore. She could draw only one conclusion: Hermione apparated off the flight somewhere in flight and was now making her way back to England to wreck havoc. It asked anyone with information about you to contact her at the Daily Prophet.

Ginny believed every single word. Now I know you made it to Australia on that flight and I know you know how to alter your identity to throw off hacks like Skeeter. I made the mistake of telling Ginny. I thought she'd be pleased to learn her friend was not evil and all. WRONG! She accused me of having an affair with you. Technically, she was right. But, at the time, you and I had broken up with the

Weasleys, so it's really none of her business whether we did or not. Still...

I know we agreed that what happened between us, however wonderful it was (and it was) was a mistake. I did not really believe that then and I don't believe it now. I made several mistakes back then. I should have come with you or, failing that, I should have told you how I really felt and given you a reason to come back to me forever as more than just my best friend. But, expressing my true feelings has always been hard. Much easier in a letter than in person, I find. No. The mistake I made was I let you go AGAIN! (Seems to be a disturbing theme in my life, Hermione.)

In many ways I let you go and you left long before that flight. I know that now and that was what I was really angry about. I am a wreck as a person. Every intimate relationship I ever had with anyone ended in disaster. True some of them died, but many others did not. They ended because I messed up somewhere. I did not know how to - how to deal with that part of me and my life. When I thought I was being noble or honorable I was really being a coward. I was afraid to let people get too close because I believed I would lose them or they would hurt me in the end. Stupid of me, really.

Another thing I learned is that the past cannot be changed. It's done. I could either be like I was and dwell on it and ask loads of 'what ifs,' and wither and fester, or I can learn from the mistakes and failures and grow as a person. The later is more satisfying, even with the pain. I cannot say if things would have been different if I did something different. I don't know. We are the sum of our experiences and those cannot be changed. So I have to live the life I was given.

But as I learned to deal with my past, I also knew that if I ever see you again I would want to talk to you and tell you something I should have told you long ago.

I let you go during our Fourth Year. I don't know if my life or your's or anyone else's would have been different or better had I not done that. I don't. But that was when I let you go.

I refused to admit it to myself then. I refused to admit it to myself years later. I refused to admit it to myself as I watched you board that plane. That was how I could let you go. But now I should tell you

what I really felt that whole time. What I still feel. I love you, Hermione.

I now know that. I refused to admit it to myself back then. I fell in love with you certainly by our Second Year. I let you go when I failed to ask you to the Yule Ball, when I believed that Ron and you were... well. I never forgave myself for that and made no effort to try and win you. I know now I wanted to and was beating myself up for years about not doing anything about it. I was and am one messed up kid. The result is who knows how much pain others have suffered over the years. I only know how much I suffered.

When you left, I was pretty sure you were not coming back. Ron had broken your precious heart into a million pieces. I was fooling myself into believing my relationship with Ginny was real. Why would you come back? Then there was that week before. I thought that was a mistake at the time. I now know it was a mistake to think that it was a mistake. I should have - but I didn't. Instead I only gave you another reason not to return and to leave me behind forever and I hated myself for that for a long time.

I was in love with you and let you go. I don't know what that means to you or if it will make any difference about anything. But I promised myself if I could, I would tell you because you deserve to know.

Ginny wants to believe you and I are having an affair? Fine! We are, or at least I am in my hopes and dreams. Should you finally write and tell me where you are, I promise you I'll find away to end this sham of a marriage and find a way to try and make a new life with the only woman I ever truly loved. Hermione, you are my only reason for being and the only person with whom I have ever been happy. I can be myself with you in ways I cannot with Ginny or anyone else for that matter (except maybe little Teddy.) I love you and probably always have and I always will, even if we never meet again. I love you and only you, Hermione.

Please save me?

With all the love in this poor heart,

Harry

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

She finished the last letter Harry had given her. She put it down, tears streaming from her eyes. He had loved her. It was one thing to hear it now, years later, but another from way back then when he was still married and still committed to trying to make it work. He had loved her. He let her go. Now he was back in her life again if only for a little while. She wanted to make sure she never would lose him and never let him let her go again.

Even more so, the way he wrote about Teddy. He sounded like such a wonderful father - although he probably let his adopted boy get away with more than she would have. Still. It was clear, given the choice, he was a father first, just as she had become a mother first. She loved being a parent, even though it was probably the most challenging thing she had ever done in her life. She knew the letters Harry was reading would begin to show that side of her, but her babies would only be four months old when he finished her first year's letters.

She now had to keep him occupied, and in public from five until sometime around nine - four hours. I want to be pretty for him, she thought. Dressed up, but not too fancy, certainly more feminine than I am now. She looked at her watch and was stunned. It was 4:42, she had no time to change or do her hair or... she would not look like the "dream date" she wanted to look like. The tears returned for a brief moment.

Janie Granger, she thought. You're a witch. Her self composure restored, she pulled out her wand and did what her little sister called the "Fairy Godmother" spell - actually several at once. She selected some tasteful jewelry to go with the dress she had transfigured, picked up her lap top full of photos of the kids, and left the room.

CHAPTER NINE

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Harry returned to his room and called up his Cousin Dudley. Teddy was staying with the Dursley clan while Harry was away and he was really calling to talk to Teddy. Teddy had been so worried when he heard his Dad was flying across the Atlantic, which struck Harry as a little odd considering, but Teddy had been younger when Harry and his boy last flew across the pond and Harry was certain Teddy hated airplanes. He called and spoke to Teddy for several minutes and, once Teddy was sure his Dad was just fine, Dudley came back on the line.

"Hey Big D," Harry said, "so how's Teddy doing?"

"He was a little worried 'bout the flying over the sea bit, Sparks," Dudley said. "But Jena and I assured him we do it all the time. No worries. Still, he seemed quite relieved when you spoke to him."

Dudley's last dig into Harry had actually occurred before the war, it seemed. After the Dementor attack, he had returned to school a changed person. His grades went from near failing to near the top of his class and he seemed to work harder at everything. He accepted an externship at a local hospital and dropped actual boxing - although he still worked out. His classmates and teachers all noticed and asked him about it and Dudley had told them about his new friend Sparks who had saved his life over the summer. Dudley could not tell them it was Harry. For years he had been bad mouthing his cousin to anyone who would listen. Dudley vaguely remembered the spark of light that shot from Harry's wand and saved his life - Sparks was born. After the War, Dudley made the connection of Sparks and Harry somewhat public and, to Harry's initial embarrassment, Sparks stuck. All of his close friends called him that. It took a while, but now he accepted it. Woe betide, however, a person who presumed they had the right to call him that to his face!

"Aside from that, you know your boy Whoseface," Dudley said. Dudley had an annoying habit of assigning nicknames to people he liked or admired. What made it really annoying was the damn names stuck like glue. Teddy was Whoseface because of his natural ability to change his appearance at will. Harry thought Dudley had been too into comic books as a lad, to be honest. Still, it could be worse.

The Dudley Harry now knew was a good friend and the kind of friend one could count on in times of trouble, as Harry had when his marriage finally unraveled. "My girls thinks he's dreamy and the boys think he's so cool. They're loving it, Sparks."

"And you and Jena are pulling your hair out," Harry chuckled.

"Not just yet. So how's New York?"

"Interesting and very American," Harry replied.

Dudley had gleaned on to Harry clues. "So, something unexpected has happened, eh?"

"You could say that."

"What?"

"Too early to tell for sure. Could go any which way. Full debriefing when I return, deal?"

"There had better be. Jena and I will be placing wagers all week, Sparks."

The phone call soon ended and Harry turned to the Hermione letters.

22 August 1999

Dear Harry:

I am sorry I have not written you sooner. A lot has happened these past few weeks but until yesterday I seemed be making no real progress in trying to find my parents. A couple of days after I posted my first letter to you, I answered an advert in the local magical paper regarding sharing a flat. I have since moved in with a real nice girl named Amanda O'Hare. She's about a year older than me and is attending university. Here, it seems, witches and wizards can attend university and continue their education after finishing school. Maybe I should look into that. I know it would mean that I'd be here for years, but I also know you would understand.

I had hoped my parents had settled here in Sydney or at least nearby. But, apparently, they have not. I've spent weeks in a library reading every phone directory I could find hoping to find the number to their home or, assuming they have one, their dental practice. No luck.

I've been under so much stress, Harry. I have been worried sick, and I mean literally! I've been throwing up for a few days now. I'm sure it's the worry. It might also be the fear that I might have to start checking the past obituary columns to find my family. I hoped that is not the case. Needless to say, my roommate is worried. She insists I should see a doctor real soon. Yesterday, she made an appointment for me with a magical doctor here in Sydney and I am going to see her (the doctor) tomorrow. I'm sure it's nothing, so don't worry, Harry.

Anyway, while making the appointment - on a Saturday afternoon - Amanda showed me this amazing Muggle technology. With a computer, you can access something called the "Internet" which instantly (almost) allows you access to more information than I could ever hope to find in the library. It's surprisingly easy to use. So, I typed in my parents names and their occupation and viola! I found them in under 5 minutes! They are nowhere near here, Harry. They have a dentistry practice in the town of Shoalwater, Western Australia which is on the Indian Ocean about an hour or so south of Perth. There were pictures of them on their Website and they look so happy, Harry!

Anyway, because I agreed to see this doctor, I'll be here just a little while longer. Once I find out I'm okay - and I am - I will fly to Perth (by airplane) and go and meet my parents. I even figured out how to do it. A week from Monday, I have an appointment at their Dental practice for a check-up. Of course they don't know it's me yet. I am so excited!

Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Here I am known as Janie Granger. (Jane is my middle name). Hermione is known here as well and I real don't want that hassle. Wish me luck!

Love,

Hermione (Janie)

29 August 1999

Dear Harry:

I was originally planning to write you after I got to Perth and after I found my parents. But, there are things I need to say to you and if I put it off, I might not say them at all or you might get a letter that will take you days to read. Besides, I am currently on the flight from Sydney to Perth and for the next few hours I can either stare out the window at the empty Australian Outback (a huge desert) or write to you. I guess you can see which activity I'd prefer.

Where to begin?

Remember the evening after we learned that Ron had gotten Lavender pregnant? Stupid question! Of course you remember! I know I will for the rest of my life. A woman always remembers the time when she lost her virginity! Harry, I know we said we thought the last few days together might have been a mistake. I know I told you that I probably became your lover because I was mad at Ron. That's not true Harry! Those two weeks I spent with you before coming here, and especially the last few days when we shared our bed and each other, those were the happiest days of my life to date. I don't want you to feel guilty about us. I hope your memory of being with me is and always will be as precious to you as my memories of that wonderful time is and always will be to me. More on that later. But, if I might add, you were fantastic, Harry!

No, right now I am writing about the question you asked me before we first made love. You asked if I thought Lavender got pregnant on purpose. I said I did not know but did not think so. I have had a lot of time to think about that since. Now, I think my answer would be yes. You see, I can kind of understand why she might do that now, Harry. I think she was and is in love with Ron - desperately in love. I think Ron was - in her mind - using her until I came home. Once I was back, I think she thought Ron would dump her like rubbish and she had reached a point where she knew she could not live as a Ron throw away.

I think I understand why she did it. I don't agree with it. I think it was wrong and stupid, but I can understand why. It was wrong because if Ron marries her, it will be for the baby and not for her. Maybe I am wrong about that. Maybe Ron loves her. But I'm not so sure about

that. I think it was stupid because what if Ron is as big a prat as I think he is? He'll not marry her and she'll be stuck with a kid she bore for the wrong reason. You should have a child because you want to have a child, not because you want to land its father. If you fail to land the father, you are then left single with a child maybe you did not really want.

What really bothers me is how did Ron not know? I mean based upon her due date she could well have been beginning to show by the time I caught them. (I only saw her face, Harry, not her belly.) Ron is such an idiot when it comes to women! I am forced to wonder if anyone bothered to tell him where babies come from!

Anyway, I think I know now how Lavender was feeling. You see Harry, there's a boy who I have very strong feelings for. I don't think he knows. I was stupid and never told him. But I now know I love him more than anything and have for a long, long time. I want to be with him so much, but it does not look like that is going to happen. I know he likes me, but I don't think he loves me the way that I love him. I would never do that to him! NEVER!

I know I truly love him, Harry. I know that because he is all I can think about these days. I also know it because all I ever want from him is for him to be happy. I would be the happiest girl on earth if I were the reason why he is happy. But, if I cannot be the one for him, then so long as he is happy I am pleased. It's so painful, Harry! If only he felt the same things for me as I do for him! But unless he does, I don't want him. I don't want him in such an intimate relationship if the feelings are not mutual. It's not fair to him (or to me.)

He's not Ron, Harry. I thought I loved Ron. I was mistaken. I knew that not long after I left him. Ron's infidelity did hurt me, Harry! It really did. But, I don't miss him at all. I never have I now know. When he left us during our time on the run, I was hurt. Not because I missed him but because he ditched us and put his own comfort above our friendship and our mission. That's not love, Harry. I should have known then he did not and would not love me. I should have known then I did not love him. I thought the pain I felt meant that I did and I will confess I did have a crush on him. The boy I love I never had a crush on because I never needed one to like him or to fall helplessly in love with him. Every boy - every man I meet is measured against him: his kindness, his compassion, his passion,

his smarts and daring, his ability to make me feel good about myself and to inspire me to exceed even my unreasonably lofty expectations of myself. I want him to be proud of me and I think he is. But does he love me as much as I love him?

But, as desperate as I want him, I will not do what Lavender did just in the futile hope that he might stay with me for the sake of a child. I have only recently realized this - that I do love him so. Because I love him so much, I know I cannot be with him unless he loves me too, I now know that I probably will not come home - not unless he tells me he feels the same way and MEANS it, Harry. I think he is in love with another woman and I think she loves him too, Harry. If so, it's not my place to expect anything from him, so I will stay away and pray that he is happy. If he is happy, then - heartbroken as I might be - I shall be content, Harry.

Do you have any idea who I am writing about? You should. You probably know him better than I do, although I'd like to think that I know him better than anyone else on Earth. You have seen him, Harry. You see him every day. You see him whenever you look into a mirror. You are the one that I love more than my own happiness and more than my life itself. I would sacrifice everything just so I know the man I love finally has the life he always wanted but never had, Harry. I love you, Harry. I have loved you for years and years, maybe in some way since we first met. (Of course, not like now, still...)

I can't come back and just be your friend, Harry. For years that was enough. Now it would only break my heart even more. I am still going to write to you. Even though I love you, I am also your friend. I still want to hear from you, but if I don't I'll understand that. I'll understand you don't feel the same way about me. I'll survive. Don't worry about me, Harry. I'm not about to do anything rash. Even if I cannot have you, I do have a reason to avoid wallowing in self pity and despair. It is the reason I am writing this particular letter today.

Once I get settled, I'll send you my address. You should get a computer because I do have e-mail. Even if I cannot be with you I still want to hear from you Harry. But PLEASE? Don't come looking for me. Don't ask me to come home. Don't! Not unless you feel the same way about me, Harry. I mean it!

Harry? Remember my last letter when I told you I was going to see a Doctor because I was not feeling well? Well, I am not sick. Apparently everything is perfectly normal. Normal as can be expected for an expectant mother to be.

I am pregnant, Harry.

I don't expect or want anything from you, Harry! I meant what I said. Unless you love me as much as I love you, I cannot bear to be with you again. It's just too hard. I am going to have this child, Harry. How can I not? I was raised a Catholic and, while not as devout as I once was, I do believe in the sanctity of an innocent life. I will not marry you if you ask just so the child has a father. I meant what I said before, even more so now.

This child, like our time together that created it, is not a mistake. It's unexpected. It is an accident. But it cannot be a mistake. God must have wanted me to have this child for some reason. I was using birth control and that is supposed to be fool proof!

(I've been using it for years, although not because of sex. It has other benefits. For women like me who have irregular and particularly difficult periods, it regulates us and takes the edge off the discomfort. I've been on birth control since I was thirteen.)

No. This child is meant to be. I will continue to write to you. Even if you don't love me, you deserve to know about this child and I still know we are friends and if I don't write, you'll worry.

I'll probably write again in a few days to tell you about my family reunion and my plans going forward.

Please don't hate me.

It's hard to believe I am going to be a Mum, but I am. Talk about an adventure!

I love you, Harry,

Hermione

1 September 1999

Dearest Harry:

I promised I'd continue to write, and I will. This has been a bizarre week full of shocks, surprises, wonderful news and the worst kind of news of all - and no, being pregnant is not the worst kind of news of all - that falls into shocks and surprises and the more I think about it, it's becoming wonderful news.

Well, I arrived safely in Perth - no worries there. On Monday late in the afternoon, I drove to my parents Dental Practice for my "appointment." I got the full drill - minus the drill, thankfully. Got my teeth cleaned and then saw the dentist. He was not my Dad. When he was done, I was told Dr. Wilkins wished to see me. I was ushered into an office and there was my Mum. There was a counter-charm I was supposed to use to fully break the spell. Proved unnecessary.

You see, Harry, the spell I used on them blocked any memory of me for so long as they were alive. Or so I thought. It seems once one of them was near death, the spell would break as to both. My father died of cancer a couple of months ago. A couple of days before he passed, the spell broke and he and Mum talked about me until his last breath.

We stopped by his grave on the way back to where my Mum lives. Harry? I know how important it was for you to go and see where your parents were buried. I wonder if it was as hard for you as it was for me. I mean - after all - you had known they passed for a long, long time. Less than an hour after I learned I lost my father, there I was at his grave. Oh, how I cried, Harry. But, like you, it provided closure I guess. I am glad I did it. I went back again today. I went back to tell him he's going to be a grandfather. I hope he's happy, Harry.

Part of me wants to take the blame for what happened to him. He was my Dad and I was his Little Princess for so long, Harry! Maybe if I ignored Ron last year and followed my original plan. Maybe if I came home to them sooner. But no, he would still have gotten cancer and still would have died, I would just have been there for the end. Still! Damn it! He's not even buried under his real name! THAT is my fault!

Oh Harry! Ever since I modified their memories and sent them off into hiding, I had been dreaming of that happy day when I would find them safe and we could be a family again. As you see, it did not happen as I planned. I was far closer to my Daddy than my Mum - a lot of girls are, I hear. Mum and I got along, but she was the one most likely to put her foot down. Daddy would let me get away with almost anything. I love my Mum, but I am SO going to miss him, Harry. He was only 49 when he passed away - far too young to die, Harry. But, this story does not end there, not by a long shot!

So, I go home with my Mum, still very sad about Daddy. We get to her house, a lovely place near the ocean, and the sun was setting and it was so beautiful, Harry. She eventually leads me into the Sunroom. There on the floor was this darling baby girl playing with her toys. She had dark brown eyes and bushy brown hair. I swear it was like looking at one of my baby pictures in the flesh! Her name is Daphne, she's my little sister and was born on April 10, 1998. She's so adorable! I guess the shock about my Dad, my own pregnancy and this surprise caught up with me. When Mum told me she was my sister, I fainted dead away!

I didn't understand, Harry. Mum told me later. I had always thought my parents had not wanted another child and, when I learned I was a witch, I thought that the reason they did not want another child is because deep down they were ashamed of me. Nothing was further from the truth. They held off having another child. They were still at university when I was born. It took them years to build their practice which required a lot of effort from both of them. When they finally felt they were ready, I was already at Hogwarts. By then, they thought they were too old. So, I erase their memory of me, but that was a targeted spell. They forgot about me and magic, but not about their desire to have a family. They "wrote over" the gap - the reason why they had no child - and concluded that they physically could not. To their pleasant surprise, they were wrong. Funny how that works!

When I came to, I learned my little sis is not just a witch, but a very special kind of witch. She has what is known as a healer manifestation, which means her uncontrolled magic heals people she cares about. She could not cure my Daddy's cancer, but the doctors think she kept him alive, lucid and comfortable far longer than would otherwise have been the case. I woke up and she was sitting on my chest fixing my "owies." I had a broken nose and some

nasty bruises, Mum said. Daphne fixed them. I hope our baby is like that.

I wish home was like Australia. Mum and Dad had totally forgotten about magic, thanks to your's truly. When they had Daphne, they were as clueless about our world as they were when they had me. Within weeks, Magical Child Welfare sent a couple to my parents to tell them about our world and about what my sister was - or would be one day. They have all kinds of programs to help non-magical families adjust and join and even participate in our world, Harry. Through that program, they met many witches and wizards and made friends. The magical folk here are very accepting of Muggles. Same's true in America, apparently. Mum and Dad met and became friends with a witch and wizard couple from America who also happened to be Dentists at a convention in Melbourne about a year before Dad passed. When Dad passed, the couple offered Mum a chance to join their practice and she jumped at the opportunity. Within a week, we are moving to St. Louis in the United States. Yesterday, I applied for a course they have there for foreign magical peoples that could allow me to attend university. I was accepted today and it starts not long after Mum and I move into the flat she's rented in Clayton.

Yesterday was terrifying, Harry. Mum had already invited me to move with her and Daphne to America and I had already accepted. But I knew I had to tell her I was pregnant. Mum was always the strait laced one in our family. I feared her reaction to the news. But, she had to know, Harry. I told her. I told her about Ron and about what happened between us. I told her how I felt about you, and how I did not know how you felt about me. I told her I was religious about birth control and how my Doctor was puzzled at how this could have happened, but how - now that it has - I intend to go through with it. I told her I wrote you and told you and what I told you.

I expected a lecture. What she did shocked me. She told me that, while she was a little disappointed in what has happened, she was proud of me - so proud. She was proud that despite this, I wanted to continue my education and she promised that she would help me as much as she could. I was her daughter after all and I was doing the right thing under the circumstances and setting an example of what to do under such circumstances for my younger sister. I guess it's what's called a bonding moment. I've never felt this much love for or from my Mum before. Silver lining, I guess.

It might be a few weeks before I write you again Harry. The flat Mum has rented is temporary. She's looking to buy a place. Since I am with her now for the foreseeable future and since I still have close to a million Pounds - almost two million U.S. Dollars - left in my account, I have offered to help. When we do move in, I'll send you our address so you can find me. Wish me luck!

I Love You!

Hermione

31 October 1999

Dear Harry:

I am sorry I have not written sooner. Things were hectic for a while and then, when they calmed down, I thought it best to wait until after my first ultra-sound - a test they do to check on the health of the growing baby.

Mum, Daphne and I are in America now. St. Louis. Gateway to the West. (Actually, we live in Clayton, just west of St. Louis. It's a suburb, but like when I was a kid growing up in Loughton, Essex, we are St. Louis just as we were London.)

They don't have the Tube here. I've learned that most cities in the U.S. do not have undergrounds or not nearly like they had in London. I've been told that New York, Chicago, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia do, but most do not. St. Louis has two lines. One runs from near where I live to the city center on the Mississippi River, another from the Airport to the city center. That's it. Like most American cities, you need a car. Mum bought a Dodge mini-van. I bought a British made Mini-Cooper. It's so cute!

My classes began September 13th. It began with a test. No study time, nothing. It was a test for us "foreigners" to identify "academic deficiencies" so that they could tailor our courses to get us our non-magical diplomas and prepare us for our college entrance exams. Needless to say, the thought that I might be academically deficient...honestly! Well, much to my horror (as you can imagine) I did not ace the exams. English (reading and writing), Literature and

Languages (French - I am fluent) I did ace. History, mathematics and science I FAILED - miserably! I really have to do better in math - the other subjects I just need to pass, but math is a huge part of the college exams.

I was assigned an Academic Counselor. He told me he was most impressed with my results, given that I had been magically educated in Europe. Europe is a backwater, he said. Most European transfers fail everything non-magical. Still, getting prepped for college and getting the American Magical Secondary School Diploma is more than just learning spells and potions and such. I needed to learn Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, possibly pre-calculus, General Sciences, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Non-magical History and Civics, just to get my full academic qualification and also take entrance exam prep courses. He said, taking classes six days a week, eight class hours a day, I could make it - with work - so that I could start university next August. I told him I was pregnant, but that I had to do this and wanted to go on to university. He said most pregnant women fail to do so, but if I was an exception, he could work a schedule that, if I applied myself, would give me a shot at an August date. Guess which option I took?

There are six of us in my class. We are in class eight hours a day, SIX days a week, Harry. Good news is, there is little homework, but study - that's intense. I am learning loads, and you know how I love that. But honestly! This makes Hogwarts seem like a vacation! Still, I guess I am a sucker for academic punishment!

Ironic. This is our eighth anniversary as best friends! Prior to today in '91, you were my only friend!

I had my first ultra-sound last week, Harry. They shoot sound waves into the body to see what's going on. The echoes are interpreted by a computer and are made to appear on a screen like a crude picture. They use this to see how the baby is doing, Harry. For me, where I am right now, it's too early to tell, but eventually, if I - or we - want, they can tell us whether the baby is a boy or a girl. This first test was to make sure everything was okay and to give an accurate estimate as to when it is due to be born - give or take a week or so.

Harry, we are going to have twins! They are due on or near April 7th!

I Love You So Much!

Hermione

P.S.: While Mum and I are looking to buy a house, we will be here a while longer. My address is:

Janie Granger

115 North Cottonseed Way

Apt. 236

Clayton, Missouri, U.S.A.

27 November 1999

Dearest Harry:

Just so you know, I make copies of my letters to you. I keep one set. Somehow, it helps me feel closer to you. The reason I started making copies was so I could read over what I had written and see what I forgot to tell you or make sure I don't get too repetitive.

Classes are long, hard and I find them invigorating! As I told you before, there are six of us in my class and we've formed a study group. We meet at each others homes every night to study and help each other with the work. Okay, we also talk and tell stories and eat - and I am eating a lot these days. The Doctor told me that I needed to put on weight for the babies - a lot more than I expected, so eat, eat, eat! I do try to stay away from junk food. Once the babies come, I'll need a diet!

My class has two boys and four girls (actually young men and young women as the youngest of us is nineteen and the oldest is twenty-three. Kind of odd for me being one of the youngest instead of one of the oldest.) The oldest is Patrick Riley. He is married and his wife Megan dotes on pregnant ol' me whenever I'm over. They have a little girl Coleen whose about Daphne's age. Pat and Megan went to St. Patrick school of Magic in Ireland. (I have only recently learned that Hogwarts is hardly the only magical school in the British Isles.) Pat and Megan came here because of the War.

Jeanette Pinot (pronounced pee-noh) is twenty-two and from France. She went to Beaubatons and knew Fleur. Jeanette had done really well in school, but her family had no connections so she was stuck with a menial job at a hotel. She came here because in America you can go on to higher education. She's thinking of attending culinary school and becoming a chef. She does cook well.

Antonio Garza and his wife Adriana are from Spain. He's twenty-one and she's my age. They came here for the education. They are planning on attending university, but do not yet know what they want to study. (I have to agree. There are so many choices!) I have developed a taste for Spanish food - especially their seafood dishes.

Then, next on the age list is me. I told them I went to Hogwarts. Yes, I was there when the Tri-Wizard was held. Yes, I have met Harry Potter and I think he's a nice guy. No, he's actually quite humble - the papers are wrong about him. Yes, I have met Fleur Delacour. Yes, I am related to The Hermione Granger, but we don't get along. I left England because of the War (which is partly true) and have been drifting around a bit (also partly true), but now that I am pregnant, I need to get an education so I can provide for my children. Yes, I have told the father, but he's overseas and - well - I don't really expect to see him anytime soon. (I want to Harry. I really do!)

Finally, there is Brianna Antonelli. She's nineteen and from Italy. She went to a magical school in Florence. She came here for education as well. Her pasta dishes are to die for!

We study Sunday through Friday nights, alternating homes. On Sundays, the hosts cook dinner for all the rest of us. So, I've been treated to an international menu of family recipes! The other nights, we order pizza or take out. I don't know if it is me or the babies, but one of us likes Kentucky Fried Chicken! Someone else love Kung Po Chicken (a spicy Chinese dish.) And a third part loves Mexican food.

No doubt about it, I am pregnant now. I'm "showing!" Getting the obvious baby belly (and the other signs, such as swollen breasts so none of my bras fit anymore.) My clothes don't fit. Mum took me out and we bought "maternity" clothes for me. Honestly! None of it is flattering. But, at least it's comfortable. Mum says that's a key to surviving pregnancy with your sanity intact - stay comfortable! I am both thrilled and horrified. I am thrilled at the thought of these new

lives growing inside of me. I swear I can feel them moving now - even as I write this. Horrified that I am getting bigger by the day. Oh well.

Anyway, last Thursday was Thanksgiving. It's a HUGE American Holiday, Harry. My classes ended at noon the day before and do not start up again until Monday. Everything shuts down on Thanksgiving - except Football (American Football). Anyway, Jack and Pamela Martin (the wizard and witch Dentists my Mum works with) invited us all over for a traditional Thanksgiving. All of us included Mum, Daphne and me as well as all my friends from school. The Martins have three children, Harry. Their oldest is Jason who is eight and has his wand and can do magic at home. In my condition, I was worried about that, but he's a little gentleman and besides, he was far more interested in the football games on the telly than doing magic. He has two younger sisters (witches): Cynthia (6) and Alicia (4). They are adorable! (Must be the Mum thing. I used to be uncomfortable around young children.)

When we arrived, there was a football game on the telly (our style of football is called soccer here, don't ask me why.) Wonderful smells of cooking food greeted us as we arrived. Jack and Pam cook "American Style" - no magic. Actually, it seems that only we Brits use magic routinely to cook. Then again, as my friend Jeanette noted, English cuisine is SO boring, it only makes sense to be lazy about it. I am starting to agree. (Mum's been teaching me to cook without magic - nothing fancy. After all I am soon going to be a Mum myself and there is something about preparing a meal. I know you cook without magic, Harry. I am beginning to see why. There is a joy to it, isn't there? Well, there is when it comes out right...)

Thanksgiving is a custom that extends all the way back to when the SECOND permanent English settlement was founded. It is a feast that was to honor the harvest and give thanks for surviving a terrible year. It has since become a celebration of family and friends. It is still a feast.

The Martins treated us to the traditional fare. We began with a nice salad and then the face stuffing began. The center of the meal was a HUGE roasted turkey. The turkey was carved and the Martins began the "traditional" debate about which was better - white meat (breast) or dark meat (thighs and wings). I tried both. They are different and the dark meat has more flavor, but either is delicious!

They also served stuffing. It looks like an English pudding, but it's not sweet. It does taste heavenly, though. We also had mashed potatoes, a thick gravy made from turkey bits and stock, corn, peas, green beans, an onion dish, rolls and two choices of cranberry sauce (it's sweet and tart and totally nummy!) My plate must have weighed five pounds or more! Then came the dessert. We had a choice between pumpkin pie or apple pie with vanilla ice cream. (I was allowed both - I am eating for three after all!) I was SO full!

Mum and I got home late that night. I was SO tired. Normally, I wake up around eight even without an alarm. But I slept until almost noon. I had such wonderful dreams, Harry. I did not want to wake up. I dreamt of you and me being together with our children. It seemed so perfect, Harry. I know it's just a dream. Still, I do want it to be a reality. I do love you so much, Harry, and I do want you in my life and in our children's lives. In my dream, there was a happily ever after with you, Harry. I know it might sound silly. I know you might not even feel the same way about me as I feel about you. But I can at least have the dream.

I Love You, Harry!

Hermione

Harry put down the letters and looked at his watch. He still had a couple of hours before he promised to meet up with Hermione again. He wondered what he would have done if he had gotten these letters when they were sent. He knew that if he had learned that Ginny was binning his letters from Hermione, he would have ended it there and then - magical rites be damned.

But he did not know. For years, he labored under the clouds. He believed that Hermione wanted nothing to do with him or anything else she had once known. Now he knew that was not true at all. Still, what if?

In early September 1999, he and Ginny were back together. She was living with him - at least when she was home, which was not often. She was having a record making season as a rookie with the all women Holyhead Harpies. She signed on as a mid season replacement for a Chaser who left to start a family. She did not even start in the Reserve Squad but was on the Main Line literally two

days after signing in a game against the team leading the league at the time - Puddlemere United. Harry's old Captain from school, Oliver Wood, was Keeper for that team and considered the best in the league. Harry was at this Match. Ginny scored thirty-six goals on Oliver - more than he had given up all season. Ginny had an additional sixteen assists as the second to last place Harpies crushed Puddlemere.

Would he have dumped Ginny back then? Those two weeks with Hermione were far better than the times he had spent with Ginny, even when they did get along. Maybe. But would he have? After what Lavender did to Ron, would he have run to Hermione's side upon learning about her pregnancy? He would now. But back then he was eighteen and did not know what he knew now. He would like to think that he would have. He would like to think that when Hermione sent him her address, he would have been on the next plane to America, he would have shown up at her door - no warning - and begged her to marry him until she said yes. That would have been the perfect end to a story, but it did not happen. Ginny had binned Hermione's letters and, but for a chance encounter years later, Harry would never have found the one true love of his life again.

What now, Harry asked himself.

Short term - one step at a time. You know you still love her. You've let her go and lost her. Never again!

Long term - marry her!

Harry picked up the remaining letters and began to read.

CHAPTER TEN

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

1 January 2000

Dear Harry:

Another month has passed, Harry. I am bigger. I can feel the little ones when they are awake. Thankfully, they seem to sleep most of the time. When they wake up, though, I've been known to scold them for causing such a ruckus in my tummy! Oddly, they seem to sense Mummy is upset with them and calm down a bit. Mum says just I wait 'til they start kicking me in the bladder. Like I am SO looking forward to that! I have monthly visits with a Doctor and so far everything is perfect!

Classes ended the 22nd of December for Christmas and we start up again the 3rd of January. I thought Thanksgiving was a big deal here! Christmas is HUGE! It starts literally the day after Thanksgiving when all the shops have HUGE sales to kick off the buying sprees! It seems the whole city is decorated with lights. Most houses have lights and decorations up. The parties continue through New Years Eve! I've been to four! The Martins had one, the Riley's hosted one for us students, there was one at our church - Mum's drug me back and we attend Mass every Sunday. And - I can't believe I forgot to tell you this, Harry!

Not long after Mum, Daphne and I arrived here in St. Louis, we were visited by Magical Child Social Services. They came in to tell us that Mum's baby daughter was a witch and all that. Of course we already knew. Anyway, we were still invited to join the various support organizations for parents of magical children. Here, there are even magical parents who are members, so Mum and I joined. I was not sure at first about my joining - I am not yet a parent and there's no way to know if our children are magical, right? But the Social Service asked me if I was of non-magical birth - as in no magical parents. Of course, I told them proudly. They said the odds are our children are more likely to be magical than had you and I been descended from Pureblood lines. Apparently, Muggle Borns are essential to the survival of magic! I - of course - asked for proof, and to my surprise I was told of several books on the subject, all based on scientific analysis done by university scholars and such and all, amazingly,

available for purchase or for order at magical bookstores in Soulard - the local magical shopping district. Three guesses what Mum got me for Christmas and the first two don't count!

Anyway, Mum and I bought a Christmas tree. It's a fake made of plastic, but we can use it year after year. We bought a bunch of ornaments and found a website that sold really fancy ones. We ordered several and each of us ordered special ones for Daphne and each other that were placed under the tree as presents. I think that's going to be a tradition with us. The tree was really pretty. Daphne had a time with her presents from Mum and me. It snowed here just before Christmas. Makes driving a real pain, but it was so lovely, Harry.

Sports are a big thing here Harry. Huge! The magical community does have its sports - Quidditch and an American game called Quadpot - but not like in Britain. Here, everyone follows the Big Four, as I call them: American Football (professional and college), Basketball (mostly college here as St. Louis does not have a professional team), Baseball (the Cardinals are the local team and you are pretty much required to love them, well not really, but still...), and Hockey (a game played on ice. The St. Louis Blues ALWAYS make the playoffs and NEVER win it all.)

I got my introduction just before Christmas. The Martins invited Mum and me (and Daphne) to join them at the "Bragging Rights" basketball game between the University of Illinois (where Jack went to school) and University of Missouri (where Pam went. They met in Dental School in Alton, Illinois, just across the river). There were 20,000 or more at the game. The Illinois fans all dressed in orange and blue and the Missouri fans in gold and black - about half and half. I don't really remember who won, but it was fun!

Remember the Quiddich World Cup? 100,000 in the stands? I could not believe so many people would want to see a game. Here, there are college football stadiums that seat more than that and sell out all the time! And it's not one match either. My guess is MOST Americans attend a sporting event or more every year. We're talking MILLIONS, Harry! As I write this letter, college football is on the telly - the big bowl games. Millions are watching, including most all of us magical types here in America. Mum and I have already been invited by the Martins to their Super Bowl party, another tradition here. It's the professional football championship game, although we are told

it's more about the party than the game. Still, the local St. Louis Rams are said to have a shot at the title, so...

Anyway, it's been a wonderful Christmas. It could have been perfect, but you are not here and I have not heard from you. I miss you so much, Harry!

I Love You, Harry!

Hermione

5 February 2000

Dearest Harry:

Less than two months left, Harry! In less than two months, our children will be born! My Doctor tells me everything is perfect, but I am still SO worried! Mum says that's normal. Although they can clearly tell what the twins are - boys, girls, or one of each - I don't want to know yet. I wish you'd be here or at least write to me. I want you to be their Daddy. More important, I want you to help me name them. Why won't you write me, Harry?

Okay, I know - you just got married. It was in all the papers here - at least the magical kind. You would think you were Royalty here for all the publicity about the "Wizarding Wedding of the Century." Still, why don't you write? I thought we were friends! I thought we had at least that, Harry. I know I love you totally, but I know I told you I'd understand if you cannot or do not feel the same way about me. I told you that this was my burden and not yours, still. I long to hear from you if only to tell me we are still friends and you still care about me as you always did.

I am sorry Harry. It seems my emotions are a bit out of sorts these days. The kiddies are acting up because their Mum is upset so I'll try not to be for their sake. (Besides, they seem to have found my bladder, and it really is a pain when one of them decides it would be fun to kick it. Why do I think Fred and George are in my belly?)

School is back in session and the work is harder than before. Still, I seem to be doing well. I've been provisionally accepted to several universities based upon my N.E.W.T. scores from home. Final

acceptance is conditioned on my passing this school and my S.A.T. scores. I am scheduled to sit for that exam in May. One of the schools that has given me a provisional acceptance is St. Louis University. I hope I get in. It's just down the way from here and I really don't want to move away from Mum. Wish me luck!

Tomorrow, I am having my baby shower. My women friends are going to shower me with gifts for the babies - mostly practical stuff I am told. I already have some things. I have bought two cribs for them to sleep in and a couple of bassinets - a portable baby sleeper. I also have two car seats for them - although I am told I will need more as they will out grow them in time.

Last chance, Harry! Unless I hear from you before they are born, if they are boys they will be named Harry Alan Potter and Robert James Potter. Robert was my Dad and James was yours. Alan was my Granddad. If they are both girls, they will be named Luna Marie Potter and Rosalyn Elaine Potter. If it's one of each, it will be Harry Robert Potter and Luna Rosalyn Potter. So, unless you write with an objection, there you go.

I do miss you so much Harry! I know you are married, but that doesn't stop me from missing you or loving you!

I Love You So Much!

Hermione

4 March 2000

Dear Harry:

I am big as a house, Harry! It's hard to get out of bed or a chair and I swear I WADDLE! I really don't want to know how fat I am. My Doctor tells me my weight is just fine, but my belly seems to enter the room a few minutes before I do. Thank goodness this will all be over soon! I think this is God's cruel joke to get us women ready for being Mums, making us fat and desperate to get the little ones out into the world. My Mum tends to agree.

We have really become close over the last several months. Before, it was my Daddy who I looked up to. Over the course of my

pregnancy and all, Mum and I have really become friends. I help her with my Sis and she helps me and tells me what to expect and such. I am so lucky and grateful to have her now!

I really want to thank her for all her love and support through this. I know, despite what she may have said, I know she was disappointed in me for getting this way. Harry, these babies are not a mistake. I know I told you that before, but I am sure of it now. I can't wait to see their faces for the first time and to hold them in my arms. If this is all I can have of you, it is more than enough. Still, I wish it was over. Being VERY pregnant really sucks. Love children is what my Mum calls them. She means I had a lover and he left me and I am stuck with the result. But she is wrong. Do I want you? Yes! But these two lives inside of me, if that's all I can have of you, these two are the greatest gift I have ever received and, if I should never hear from you again, Harry thank you!

I mean that! I want to thank you for being my friend. I want to thank you for being there for me when no one else was. I want to thank you for making me see I mattered. I want to thank you for all the years we had and the two marvelous weeks we had together. Our babies will know that you were special to me and that I love you and always will and that I think, in a way, you loved me too, and that you love them.

Anyway (sorry, I was getting all weepy, and I know how that bothers you...) my classmates and the school decided to set our Spring Holiday by my delivery. We attend class now almost every day. When I go into labor that will start our break. You have no idea how touched I was by that. It was not my idea but theirs.

I know this is a shorter letter than usual. Honestly, there really is not that much to report. I am doing well as a student (as if that was a surprise), our babies are doing well and they will be here soon. I really would love to hear from you! I promise this much: in my next letter, I will introduce you to your children!

I Love You!

Hermione

30 March 2000

Dearest Harry:

It happened!

You are a Daddy!

A boy - Harry Robert, and a girl Luna Rosalyn!

The babies were due on April 7th, but that just meant they were due sometime around that date Harry and I was told twins tend to come early. Basically I was told that I could go into labor anytime after March 15th. So basically, every morning after March 15th I woke up a little excited hoping this would be the day! To be honest I was getting really tired of being pregnant. While I was thrilled at feeling our children growing and moving inside me, the side effects were getting annoying. I was SO big it was hard to stand up. I swear I could barely fit into the shower off my bedroom! (Okay, that was an exaggeration.) My back was sore. My ankles seemed swollen. I was moody and irritable all the time. Studying was hard work because when I got done with school all I wanted to do was sleep. It was time, Harry.

One day during my first class I began having these cramps. I did think much of them at first. I knew it might be the onset of labor, but they were mild and went away quickly - only to come back several minutes later. By the afternoon, I was pretty sure it started, but there was no need to hurry or get worried. My Doctor told me I did not have to come to the hospital until my water broke. Fortunately, my class was not far from the hospital so I planned to go there right after class just to check. I had a bag packed in my car just in case (it had been there over a week.)

During our afternoon break, Megan came up to me in the restroom and asked if I was okay. I guess she knew I was in labor (she has been through it herself after all.) I told her I was probably in labor but that it wasn't too bad yet and my water had not broken, so I wanted to try and finish the day - although it was hard to concentrate. My last class for the day was History and we were studying the Second World War. I liked this class much more than math or physics, even though I was doing well in all my courses. Anyway, around four-thirty I had my first real contraction. Now everybody knew, because I'm

pretty sure I screamed a bit. Just in case that had not gotten my attention, my water then broke.

I was so embarrassed! My pants were soaked and it must have looked like I had peed myself. But, red faced as I was, I had to get to the hospital. Megan helped me to my car and drove me there while Pat followed us in his car (and apparently, so did everyone else as it had been agreed, my labor triggered our Spring Break.) I called my Mum on my cell phone and told her what was happening. I had another contraction on the way to the hospital and tried to remind myself that the Crutiatius Curse was worse. I must have said that out loud because Megan asked if I had ever suffered that curse. I told I had during the War and thankfully she left it at that.

My Mum arrived at the hospital about a half an hour after I did. The doctors had told me it might be several more hours before I was ready to deliver. I was not happy with that bit of news. It might not be as bad as what Bellatrix did to me, but is still bloody hurt! And it was exhausting! I just wanted them OUT!

FINALLY! A little after midnight I was placed on a gurney and wheeled to the delivery room. Mum was with me. She had agreed to be my "coach." I was so grateful that she was there and she told me later she was thrilled to be able to spend such a special time with her daughter. I couldn't help it. When she said that I cried. Growing up, Mum and I were never as close as Daddy and I were. These past several months, however, have been a blessing. From the moment she learned I was pregnant, Mum has been by my side and has been teaching me everything I need to know about raising babies - letting me practice on my Sis.

Harry Robert was born at 12:47 in the morning, March 22nd, 2000. His sister Luna Rosalyn followed four minutes later. Harry was 5 lbs, 14 oz. at birth. I was told that was a healthy size for a twin. I wish I could tell you his hair color, but I can't because he does not have any yet. I can tell you the color of his eyes. He has the most beautiful green eyes just like his Daddy. Luna was 6 lbs, 1 oz. at birth. She was born with a head of fine, blonde hair - like my Mum and blue eyes like my Daddy. They are both so amazing. I cannot believe its true that I had a hand in bringing two such wonderful, new lives into the world. Mum was so proud of me. I was so proud of our Harry and Luna.

I've been home now about a week. My classes begin again on Monday. Part of me does not want to go back. I love being a Mum. I love taking care of Harry, Luna and my Sis. Thankfully, it is not that hard now as the two little ones sleep most of the time. They are already getting bigger. Part of me does not want to miss anything. But Mum is right. I have to go back to school and finish my education so I can get a decent job to support these two beauties. I am not hurting for money, Harry. But what I do have will not last forever.

So, with some reluctance, I will go back. Mum has Daphne in a day care which is where our two will probably go while I am in school. Fortunately, I only have a couple of months left. Then I have a whole summer to spend with these darlings before I start college. I am so looking forward to that!

The prince or princess is calling. So I've got to go.

I Love You Harry and miss you loads.

Hermione

29 April 2000

Dear Harry:

This past month has been hectic, Harry. My classmates and I are apparently well ahead of schedule so our school has pushed up everything. We sat for our S.A.T.s today, Harry. Six hours! I know I did well on the English portion. I think I did well at Math, but we'll see. We will finish before the end of May and hopefully I will know if and where I will be going to college next fall.

Because they moved everything up, it seems as if my workload has doubled. I found it odd, at first, that I seemed to be the only one complaining. I know you may find it hard that I was actually complaining about more work, but I was. I then realized it was not the workload alone, but the workload coupled with the new demands on my time as a Mum.

The babies are wonderful, Harry. I really have no good complaints, but having two of them is a lot of work and newborns are the hardest

of all, Mum says. She also says she's a bit envious of me. Why? She says even though I have two - and that's always far more work than one - they are such good babies. As newborns, they don't really do much except eat, poop and sleep - and they sleep a lot. I figure they are sleeping close to eighteen hours a day and they get cranky if you wake them up before they are good and ready. When they are awake, fed and cleaned, they are happy and raise hardly a fuss. According to Mum, Daphne and I were more likely to complain even when nothing seemed to be wrong with us. Mum thinks Harry and Luna's laid back nature must come from your side. So long as I pay attention to them, they are content to sit there and observe this strange, new world they have entered.

I have been allowed to bring them to class with me. I was a little concerned about it because I did not know how my classmates would react - especially when the time came to change nappies (the Americans call them diapers) or to feed them (I am breast feeding them - it's easier and better for them in the long run.) Actually, I think I was most concerned with Patrick and Antonio - I figured the women in my class would have no issue at all (and I was right). But Patrick is a father (Coleen) and Antonio and Adrianna are planning to have kids. In fact, Adriana has taken it upon herself to help her husband learn about babies so, if I am busy or if both the little darlings need changing, Antonio helps. When the babies are awake in class, they have a lap to sit on if they want one - everybody seems to love them so they actually spend more time with my classmates than with me - and of course they also attend our study sessions. While they seem to be better at sleeping through a lecture than you or Ron were in History of Magic, part of me hopes this experience rubs off on them and they learn to love learning as much as I do.

I was a little concerned at first about bringing them to class with me. I was afraid that they might be exposed to germs and get sick. Mum told me that they are probably safer in a class full of young adults than they would be in Day Care because we are less likely to be sick than young children. So far, so good! They have not even had the sniffles and they do seem to enjoy it - when they are awake that is. In fact, if our professor says something that we students find amusing enough to chuckle or laugh about, the loudest laughs are from the kids. My history professor seems to make it a point to make them laugh!

I'd like to think they are having a wonderful start to life and am so glad I can be with them all the time. I know I would miss them terribly - and will miss them (they will probably have to be in day care when I start college) - probably as much as I miss you! Then again, I would know that I would see them in a few hours, whereas with you, Harry, I honestly do not know when or if I will ever see you again. That has proven far harder than I ever imagined!

When we are home and they are awake and I am studying, I sit them on my lap so they can see the book I am reading and read it out loud to them. I know they probably don't understand most all of what I am saying. (They understand their names, and that I am Mum and Mum is Gran and my friends names and such - or at least seem to - but that's it so far.) I know that even if they did, they could probably care less about Electromagnetic Theory, Basic Differential Calculus or the Korean War. Still, they act like it's the most fun to be had. I like to think it's because they are spending "Quality Time" with their Mum. Harry, I am doing my best to see that your babies have the childhood that you were denied. I really am!

I am sorry, Harry. None of that explains why I've been complaining about the workload. But, I wanted you to know just how much I love our babies and how I have no regrets over the time they spend with their Mum. I love being with them. I really do. But, as good as they are, they are newborns, and newborns don't keep regular hours.

Mum warned me in advance. She told me to expect weeks, if not months of sleepless nights. A newborn needs to feed every few hours or so and no baby likes a soiled nappy, not really - certainly not when they are asleep. Mum never had twins (obviously) and warned that it might be worse for me than it was for her with just one child to worry about. It was. One of them would wake up wanting a change or a meal and that would set the other one off. If he or she was not in need of attention, they were upset about the noise the other was causing.

At first, I dealt with the one in immediate need of attention - be it a nappy change or a feed or both. Then, if the other was only upset from the lack of consideration their sibling had shown for their sleep, I rock them back into a nice slumber and put them back to bed. The problem was they each had their own schedule. Invariably, an hour or so later, the other one would want his or her Mum. I was lucky to get three hours of uninterrupted sleep at a time at night. (Mum would

take care of them during the days I had off to let me get a nap, but I was still exhausted all the time. At night, it is easier for both of us if I feed them. Breast feeding is not nearly as time consuming as bottle feeding for newborns. With a bottle - be it breast milk or formula - you have to worry about the temperature of the milk. If it's not just right, the baby won't eat. After a few months and especially after they are weaned, they get less picky, Mum says - but I'm not there yet.)

Poor me! No sleep and I still had to go to class and learn and all I wanted to do was sleep! After about two weeks, I snapped a little. I decided that if one woke up and he or she woke the other one (occasionally that did not happen) I would change and feed both of them so at least their schedules matched. It seemed to work as I was able to get a little more sleep every night. Still, I prayed for the day they would both sleep six or more hours at night so I could get a halfway decent night's sleep. A few days ago, the Darlings slept for almost eight hours! I was thrilled and kissed them all over when they woke up for letting their Mummy (finally) get a decent sleep herself. So far, they've kept at it and I am not the total wreck I was before. I was SO grateful they really let me sleep last night before my exams! (I wonder if they knew? I doubt it. Still...)

Harry, I wish you were here with me right now or I was there with you. I wish you could see our children and experience the joy in their being as I do. I wish you could help me with them when I need it. But most of all, I wish we were together because I miss you so terribly it hurts!

When we were last together, when I had to leave to find my family, how I wish I told you how I really felt about you. I love you Harry. I always have. I was really messed up in the head at the time and for that I am sorry. I wonder what would have happened if I had the courage to tell you? Would it have changed things? Would we be together as I hope and dream?

Harry, I know you are now married to Ginny. I saw it in the papers months ago. I wonder if that would have happened if I had the courage to truly open my heart to you. I don't know. It would have only if you felt the same way. Did you? Sometimes it seemed as if you might. But that's not what happened. For now, I pray you are happy in your life and marriage. While I now truly wish it was me who met you at the altar, so long as your life is happy, I cannot ask

for more as that is all I have ever wanted. Your happiness is all I have ever wanted. I just wish I was the reason.

I am sorry, Harry. I know how emotional stuff makes you uncomfortable. I think I know why (read Dursleys). But I do miss you terribly and love you more than anything. I just want you to know, I am trying to be the best Mum ever for our children and hope one day you'll meet them and be as proud of them as I am.

I am crying now because I miss you SO much.

I will love you forever, Harry.

Hermione

P.S.: Harry's hair is coming in. I don't know yet if it is as uncontrollable as yours is, but it is the same color! A part of me hopes that he and Luna will inherit my eyesight. Too early to tell on that.

28 May 2000

Dear Harry:

Well, my school is now officially over. I've graduated! They had a ceremony for all six of us. We dressed in academic robes - the same worn by all secondary school and up type graduates in this country. They are based upon a Medieval or Renaissance design. The girls wore magenta robes and the boys black. We had our family and friends to witness as we received our diplomas saying that we had successfully finished Secondary School. Part of me wished we had a similar ceremony at Hogwarts. Finishing school is an important occasion and should be more than just boarding the train home for one last time!

My Mum's colleagues, the Martins were there and they hosted a graduation party for us. They have been like a surrogate family to all of us since Thanksgiving. Two weekends ago, they took the lot of us to our first baseball game. The St. Louis Cardinals were playing the Los Angeles Dodgers. The local team won 5-4. The Martins explained baseball to all of us (and were helped by the fans sitting all around us. I think I might actually like this game as a spectator!)

I finished at the top of my class, but there was not huge difference between the six of us. We all did extremely well and all did well on our S.A.T.s. The Class of 2000 is one of the best the school ever had academically. I and the Rileys and Garzas are all accepted to and going to attend St. Louis University starting in the fall term. Brianna is going to Notre Dame in Indiana - a good school - and Jeanette has been accepted to a top notch culinary school. We have all promised to keep in touch. I am so grateful for all the help they have given me in assimilating and with the babies. As for Jeanette and Brianna, I will miss them! Oh, and we all just learned that Adrianna is pregnant! As she has helped me, I have promised to help her.

Next week, our babies are going to be baptized. I really wish you could be here for that, but as I have not heard from you in ages... I have asked Mum's colleague Jack Martin to stand as Godfather to Harry and Pat Riley as Luna's. I asked Megan and Pamela to be the Godmothers. I have invited all my friends and they will all be there. Mum's going to host a party afterwards. It should be special!

The babies are doing wonderfully! I am so looking forward to spending this summer with them! Luna rolled herself over just the other day and boy did Harry seem jealous. He's been trying hard to do the same thing ever since! I know they like each other, but I am getting the feeling there's a competitive streak between them. It may be useful (Mum and Pam Martin told me boys potty train later than girls. Maybe, if Luna gets out of nappies, Harry will be inspired to follow along just to stay even! Although it's over a year away, I can't wait!)

Oh, I know I forgot to tell you this. Although neither has manifested yet (and, unless they were born metamorphaguses like Teddy, they would not have) our babies are both magical - and apparently VERY magical. Magical Child Services informed me of that a little over a month ago when they had their monthly visit with Mum and Daphne. I knew, deep down, they probably were, still I cannot say there was not a part of me that was concerned just a little. It's a parent thing, I suppose.

Harry, I do wish you would write me. I do wish you would tell me you know of us. I don't expect you to come and see us, but I do wish you would tell me and us that you do care for us in some small way. I

know you are married. I know you must love Ginny. But I wish you would let me know we are still friends despite everything. I love you Harry and miss you as my best and truest friend.

Our children will grow up knowing how special you are to me and how much their Mummy loves you. They will grow up knowing how special you are - although I will protect your true identity from them for now out of my abiding respect and love for you. Obviously, if you don't want to hear from me and don't want your children to know who you are, I should respect that. All I want for you is for you to be happy. But our babies deserve to know at least a little about their wonderful Daddy whom I love SO MUCH! When they are older, I will tell them about you and how wonderful you are.

Still, there are plenty of stories I can tell them without invading your privacy. And those stories I will tell, My Love. I will tell them about how brave you are and how noble. I will tell them you were practically born famous, yet wanted nothing to do with fame or fortune - unless you earned it for what you really did and not for what others claimed you did, and even then not so much. I will tell them what I love about you - your kindness, your support, your ability to see things in people they cannot see for themselves, your inherent gift of leadership and your "saving people" thing. As much as you might think that annoyed me, it only did because you might have died and that was a fate I could not accept. I now know that is the reason I did not tell you how I truly felt about you. During that damned war, I was afraid you would die and I felt it was better for me to lose you as a friend than as the only love I had and will ever know.

Harry? That was the biggest mistake I have ever made. I wish I had told you that you are my LIFE! I wonder all the time, if I had told you that, if I had told you that before I left, would we be together now? I'd like to think that we would. I really wish that we were! I want my one and only best friend back!

I miss you so much!

I love you, Harry! Honestly!

Hermione

Harry put the remaining three letters from their first year apart down. He could not read any further - not yet. She had loved him as much as he had loved her and the realization had brought him to tears. He had missed his children's birth. He had missed their first months of life. He had missed their entire lives. He had missed watching Hermione grow into what seemed to be a mother he wished he had had and that any child deserved. He had missed all that because of a jealous girl who he had wasted years of his life with when all the while, the one and only woman in the world wanted him, as a friend and as the love of her life. Ginny had denied him children. Hermione had given him children. Ginny wanted his fame, wealth and glory. Hermione wanted him and nothing more. How could he have been so stupid!

But how do I feel about her now, he asked herself.

You love her, he answered. You have loved her all these years and you still do.

Still...

Cut the crap, Harry. Indecision is what cost you her time and time again.

But, it's been seven years! We have changed. We both have, haven't we?

And yet, for seven years, even when you were married to another, you wrote her every month, and on her birthday, and on the anniversary of the day she left. For seven years, even when you were married, it was Hermione you worried about. It was Hermione you dreamt about at night. It was Hermione who was the last thought before sleep took you and the first thought you had in the morning.

It was thinking of her and dreaming she was with me that kept the nightmares under control.

You wrote her again not three weeks ago, Harry. You dreamt of her last night - as always. You remember the dream.

I do. It's the same theme. We are married, happy and at the park watching our children play. It's always warm and sunny and she is always as beautiful as an angel.

But not half as beautiful as she is now, don't you think?

She was stunning! My mouth was dry when I first walked up to her this morning, hoping and praying it was her, yet fearing it was as well.

Your fears seem unjustified.

Which has me a bit confused. She could have easily thought I hated her and she could have hated me for it, but she seemed - it seemed almost as if we last saw each other yesterday.

Which might mean?

The memory of me is as important to her as hers is to me.

Memory? Is that all she can be?

I don't know.

What do you want?

What I probably can't have.

Why can't you?

Her life is here now. I have a life in Britain. I can't ask her to throw away her life - to uproot her family and come home. I can't do that to Teddy either.

You know how resilient children can be, Harry. He could adapt, so could her children.

I just don't see it.

So you will let her go again? The last time would have been forever had fortune not intervened today. The next time? Do you really think you can let her go again?

I...

You know damn well you can never be truly happy without her in your life.

But does she feel the same way about me? She admitted she stopped writing me three years ago.

Does not mean she stopped loving you, does it? You never wrote back! What was the poor girl supposed to think. You saw her face this morning! Did that look like the face of someone who wanted nothing to do with you?

What am I going to do?

You know damn well!

Indeed. This time, if fate tears us apart, it will not be because I let it!

Times a wasting, Harry! Go down and get her back in your life!

With that final thought, Harry went to the sink and washed the tears from his eyes, picked up his own laptop and left the room to try and start the rest of his life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

When Harry arrived in the huge and towering Atrium of Hotel Enchance - the Plaza Hotel of the American Magical World on Central Park West in New York, he could see that Hermione was not there yet. He hoped that she was being a woman - running later rather than earlier. He feared she was thinking of not seeing him at all. He would not blame her if she had made that decision. He had dropped in on her life unannounced and, while he thought there was still something there between them, he did not really know. He would understand if she got cold feet, but he would be crushed just the same.

He loved this country. He had spent quite a bit of time over here over the years, mainly due to his connections with the Magical Section of the F.B.I. which had augmented the Aurors after they had been all but wiped out in the War. Britain's allies had sent "aide" to help end the madness. Harry's first Mentors in the Auror's office was an American F.B.I. Agent and a Chief Inspector from the non-magical New Scotland Yard. He loved the openness of this Country. He loved the fact that while "Harry Potter" was known over here, he was not a celebrity and could stand, as he did now, in the middle of a major magical gathering place and not be hounded for autographs, pictures or interviews. He could be just Harry, and not the famous War Hero, not the Deputy Head of his department, not the 34th Earl of Godricston, and not what some believed was the wealthiest bachelor in magical Britain. He could actually people watch and get away with it.

He saw her first. She was hard to miss. She was wearing a light blue - periwinkle, Harry knew - dress. It was the same color as the gown she had worn all those years ago at the Yule Ball and it flattered her every bit as much now as it did then. Her dress was not nearly as fancy or frilly, more of a summer dress, Harry thought. Still. It seemed to make her glow all the more. Clearly she was looking for him. It was, after all, a large Atrium. He would give her a bit of time, so he could gaze at her without concern.

She finally saw him and waved as she began to hurry over. There was such a huge smile on her face. Harry had always loved her smile. He loved most of her expressions, but her smile made her

glow as no other woman could ever hoped to, in Harry's humble opinion. Still, she was drop dead gorgeous. Harry had always thought she was cute, pretty when she made even the slightest effort and beautiful when she tried just a little more. She had never looked this good. Harry knew this was true because he had all kinds of photos of her that somehow Ginny had not found and he looked at them almost every day since Hermione left. But she never looked this good. Perhaps the seven years was a good thing in a way. She had clearly blossomed like a most precious rose. Had he seen her over this time, he might not have noticed. Damn, he thought. I am now officially done for.

As she got closer, Harry noted she had an odd expression on her face. He could tell from it what it was not. She was not angry. She was not overcome with glee. She was not truly upset. She was not lost in thought - a normal thing for her in the past and one which Harry knew instinctively. He tried to place the expression - a question? Wonder? Damn, she was gorgeous!

"You look wonderful, Hermione."

She smiled. Harry could tell that smile - the one where she was both pleased with herself and pleased that he appreciated something about her. He always melted at that smile in the past, and today it was no different. She kept coming towards him slowly.

"Thanks, Harry," she whispered and she hugged him tight and he hugged her back. Her head rested on his shoulder as she squeezed against him. "God, I've missed you," she added.

"I've missed you too, Hermione," Harry whispered back as he rocked her slowly.

She eventually looked up at his face, her eyes glistening. Harry could not help himself. This is what he had dreamt about for years, to have her back again. She had a bemused and almost inviting expression as she stared into his eyes. He could not help himself. Slowly, drawn in by her eyes, he leaned in and kissed her. She did not resist or pull back, she joined him and returned the kiss with a passion. Harry had no idea how long they stood there locked in an embrace and the most passionate kiss in memory. Finally, as if by unspoken mutual agreement, their lips separated and they looked into each other eyes from inches away.

"What just happened, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"I kissed you," Harry whispered. Hermione gave him what he once had thought of the "you're the Master of the Obvious," look. "And you kissed me back," Harry added.

"That's not what I meant," Hermione replied quietly, unable to do anything but stare into his eyes.

"I know," Harry replied as he closed the distance again. She had no idea how long the second kiss was, only that it was long and even better than the first. She had gone weak all over. It finally broke, but even then she thought it was too soon. She did not know it, but she was smiling up at Harry. Harry looked into her eyes for a long moment and then his eyes darted from side to side before engaging hers again.

"It seems people are looking at us," he said softly. She flushed. "I guess, if anyone asks, we could always say we're newlyweds," he said with a mischievous smile.

"Or," she replied, "we just go over and take a seat at a nice out-of-the-way table."

Harry nodded. I still love her, he thought to himself as he took her hand in his and they walked to a nice corner of the atrium.

Damn it, Hermione thought. I do still love him! How's this ever going to work?

They took their seat at a small table for two that Hermione thought was both out-of-the-way and quite cozy. She was dying to interrogate Harry further about the kiss, but before she could open her mouth to speak, the waiter arrived.

"Would you like a menu?" He asked.

"Yes," Harry said.

"No," Hermione added immediately. She saw a look of confusion on Harry's face. "I made reservations for us at the main restaurant for six-thirty. You don't mind?"

"Love to," Harry smiled. "I guess that's a no on the menus then."

"A drink perhaps?"

"Iced tea," Harry said. Hermione was stunned. Harry was a Brit in America, not an Americanized Brit like she was. The British do not drink iced tea. She did. More questions.

"Same for me, thank you," she added.

After the waiter left, Harry leaned in with a slightly excited expression. "I've been dying to eat there since I arrived late last night! Have you seen the menu? Classic steaks, southern style cooking and bar-be-que, cajun! You know, there are places in London that claim to serve genuine American fare. Rubbish. It is edible, but it's not the real thing! Then again, this might not be either, it is New York and not New Orleans or Atlanta or Memphis, still. I do miss the real thing! Made me a little homesick, really."

"Why would American food make you make you think of London, Harry?" The kiss question could wait, she thought to herself.

"Not American food in general," Harry said, "good ol' down home southern food," he added in a passable southern accent.

"Harry, how do you know about that?"

"I'd like to say I read about it in a book," Harry quipped. Hermione glared at him. "Sorry, poor joke. Your letters from St. Louis made me a little homesick as well. It's hard to find decent Thanksgiving Turkeys in London and I do miss baseball and basketball - and even football."

"What do you mean miss," Hermione began. She then gasped! "YOU LIVED HERE?"

"Not here, 'Mione, not New York. Who would want to be a Yankees fan - or a Mets fan for that matter."

"While I agree with that - being a Cardinals fan - what are you saying, Harry?"

"Don't have much use for them either," Harry winked. "Or the National League Central."

"Harry," she growled!

"Okay," Harry surrendered. "You see, in late 2001, I and a few others were called into the Minister's Office for a meeting..."

THURSDAY, 20 DECEMBER, 2001 - AUROR'S OFFICE,
MINISTRY OF MAGIC, LONDON, U.K.

Harry walked into the office and over to his desk. It was 7:30 in the morning and he was dying for a cup of coffee. He had a lousy night. He had had a lousy night almost every night since the end of November - when the National Championship Game won by his wife and the Holyhead Harpies ended the Quidditch season. Even their two year anniversary had been lousy. He had missed her. He knew that. But it seemed whenever she was around, they would fight. She was once again insisting he should resign from the Ministry and yesterday, for not apparent reason, she went off on a rant about how Hermione had ruined everyone's lives.

She had also made it perfectly clear, again, that she was not about to ruin her "Hall of Fame" career and have kids. Since she needed at least ten years in the League - preferably twenty - by the time her career ended, she would be too old, so Teddy would have to do. Harry had come to hate Quidditch - and as it was practically the only other thing she talked about, he was praying for the season to start so she would leave again. This is not the way it is supposed to be between a husband and a wife, he thought as he picked up the night reports and began to read.

"Don't tell me you had another fight with the wife, Harry," a voice said. Harry looked up and saw his partner taking his seat across from him. His partner was Kevin Malone, a Special Agent from the American Federal Bureau of Investigations, Magical Section who had been "on loan" to the British Auror's Office since July of 1998. Harry had learned a lot about the magical United States from his long association with his mentor and friend and wished desperately that Britain was like that land across the sea in so many ways. He and others had begun taking steps which he hoped would achieve something like that here, one day.

"Alright, I won't," Harry said.

"I swear, that marriage of yours," Kevin began.

"I know. Believe me, it gets worse and if I could figure a way out of it, it would be over."

"We could always arrange for her to have an accident," Kevin quipped.

Harry looked shocked, until he realized it was another of Kevin's Mob jokes.

"Women," Kevin began.

"Can't live with 'em, can't kill 'em," Harry finished and chuckled a bit. "So how are things in a normal home?"

"Forget normal, Mate," Kevin said, "with the move coming up after Christmas, Marie is about to have kittens. The kids - well Michael and Christy - are upset. They don't want to leave their friends."

"Erin?" Harry asked. Erin was the youngest of the three Malone children.

"She was just a baby when we came here. She's actually a little excited about the new adventure, as she calls it."

"I'll miss you, Mate."

"Likewise. Any idea who your new partner will be?"

Harry shrugged. "Probably some rookie fresh out of the Academy, all full of ideas."

"Full of shit, you mean."

"Yeah."

"And harder to train than you were."

"Probably," Harry said. Actually, Harry had been easy to train in Kevin's opinion. Then again, Harry had come strait from the

battlefield to the police work. Unlike the Academy grads, Harry knew he knew nothing and soaked up every bit of knowledge Kevin provided.

"Potter!" A female voice boomed. Everyone knew its owner. Amanda Savage was the head of the Auror Department.

Kevin looked at Harry and whispered, "What'd you do to piss off the Boss Lady?"

"Not a clue. If this were home, I'd guess I left the toilet seat up."

Kevin chuckled as Amanda arrived in front of them.

"Your presence is requested in the Minister's Conference Room," Amanda said to him.

"When?" Harry asked.

"Now!"

Harry stood. "Yes, Ma'am. Any idea for what?"

"Not a clue."

Harry nodded and hurried out of the office. Even though he considered Kingsley Shacklebolt a friend and had dinners with him and their wives, he knew that during working hours it was unwise to keep the Minister for Magic waiting.

"Bloke can't even enjoy a decent cup of coffee around here," Harry quipped as he left.

THURSDAY, 20 DECEMBER, 2001 - OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR MAGIC FOR BRITANNIA, LONDON, U.K.

When Harry entered the conference room, there were already several people seated around the large, wooden table. He knew all of them. Some he had gone to school with. He took his seat next to Draco Malfoy, now a Senior Prosecutor with the Chief Prosecutor's Office. He nodded to Ernie MacMillan, from Magical Law Enforcement. There was also Justin Finch-Fletchley, Muggle Relations; Katie Bell, Wizengamot Services Legislative Affairs; Zach

Smith, International Affairs; Susan Bones, Court Services - the same job her mother had once held early in her career; Terry Boot, Magical Transport Office; Parvati Patil, Magical Board of Education; Pamda Patil, Magical Board of Health. The others he had come to know recently. They were from all over the Ministry. They all were about the same age. Many had gone to other magical schools in the British Isles.

"Guess this is a meeting of the Charter Committee," Harry noted..

"Master of the obvious, as per usual," Malfoy chided.

"Someone has to be," Harry quipped, getting a chuckle from the assembly. "Any clue as to what this is about?"

"The Charter goes to the Wizengamot in two weeks," Malfoy noted dryly. "Probably has something to do with that."

"Probably," Harry agreed.

The Minister entered and took his seat at the head of the long table. "So," he said, "my guess is you are all wondering why you are here?"

Everyone chuckled.

"As you all know, the Charter shall be submitted before the full Wizengamot for consideration as the only legislative item during the next term after the New Year. While I am confident that in the end it shall pass, I do expect lengthy and heated debate, both in the Assembly and in the Press. I also expect that inevitably pressure will be brought to bear to defeat the Charter by those who stand to lose the most by its passage."

"Muggle haters and blood maniacs," Draco Malfoy said.

"Exactly," the Minister agreed. "You know as well as anyone, Draco, what that Bill of Rights for All Mankind you wrote would mean to them."

"All to well, Sir. Wouldn't be surprised if one of those nutters tried to off me for it."

"Unfortunately, I would assume that is more than mere speculation," the Minister said. "I expect enormous pressure will be brought to bear to defeat, undermine, or alter to the point of uselessness all the hard work you all have done over the last two years. I would expect pressure to be brought to bear on each of you to renounce this work."

"Never," several voices said!

"But," the Minister continued, "as you all are aware, this Charter is not the end, but the beginning of the reformation of our Country. With its passage, most of our old laws will be obsolete. All of our governmental institutions will be changed. I still need the 'Young Turks' to come up with the ideas and flesh out the detail for that change.

"So, in light of the potential threats of political intrigue and the need for a core who can turn this Charter into a reality, and after consulting with our liaisons and some trusted advisors, I have decided that all of you need to go somewhere and learn about the details we will need to implement."

"Are you suggesting we are going into hiding?" Harry asked.

"Not exactly. You are all being assigned to new postings in your current fields in the United States."

There were gasps from around the table. The Charter was based largely on the Charter and laws of that country, even though few of them had ever been there.

"While there, you will all also attend University, studying in your fields."

"Sounds like we may be there a while," Draco said.

"Two years," the Minister said in reply. "This is voluntary, of course, but I would strongly recommend your agreement."

"I'm in," Draco said. The others all followed suit leaving only Harry. He nodded as well. Ginny's going to kill me, he thought. Then again, two years away from her might be a good thing.

"I am pleased," the Minister said as all thirty agreed, even if reluctantly. "You will move just after Christmas. You may bring your families and housing has already been arranged. While your belongings will be moved magically, as part of this process we will expect you to use Muggle transport."

"Great," Malfoy moaned.

"It's not all that bad," Harry said. "Planes do fly."

"Unless they're flown by some nutter who wants to destroy a building," Malfoy added. The attacks on New York and Washington happened only a few months earlier and were well known in Magical Britain. "I just got married," Draco sighed. "Some honeymoon, flying into a building."

"I'm sure that won't happen," Harry said.

"Yeah? While I agree, I'm sure I'll have to sedate my wife for the flight!"

"At least she will go," Harry moped.

"Ginny?"

"First thing she'll do is demand I resign for the millionth time. Then she'll throw a fit. Finally, she'll kick me and Teddy out. No way she's coming."

"I'm sorry."

"I married her," Harry shrugged.

"Teddy?"

"Not about to leave him with her, am I? No. He's coming with me."

Apparently similar conversations were being held all around the table. When the din finally died down, the Minister began to tell each of them where they were going.

One by one, each got their new assignment.

"Draco Malfoy," the Minister said eventually.

"Sir?"

"You will be assigned to the U.S. Attorney General's Office - Magical Section - in Austin, Texas. You will study law at the University of Texas."

"Sir!"

"I am told Austin is a wonderful city," the Minister added.

"Well, it seems I will soon find out about that," Draco replied.

After a few more assignments were handed out, the Minister called:
"Harry Potter."

"Sir!"

"Federal Bureau of Investigations - Magical Section - Atlanta Field Office."

"Atlanta? That's where my partner is being reassigned to as Assistant Agent in Charge!"

"It seems there is a method to my madness," the Minister chuckled.

"Wow! At least I will know someone."

"That and aren't the Malone's Teddy's favorite babysitters," Draco noted?

"Yeah. He's gonna love it!"

"Harry?"

"Sorry Minister."

"You will attend Georgia Tech University in Atlanta to study Political Science."

"What's that?"

"The study of governmental systems, I am told."

"But what's that got to do with criminal investigations?"

"Nothing. But, I am sure the F.B.I. will fill that void nicely."

"Yes, Sir. Ah - what about my votes in the Wizengamot?"

"Legislative Affairs will contact you in regards to your proxy votes, Potter. I assume you'd vote in favor of the Charter, Bill of rights and against debate or amendment?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Your Houses control over a quarter of all votes. I think it's fair to say we would like those votes on our side of the aisle."

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"Atlanta?" Hermione gasped. "You were there how long?"

"Two years. Teddy and I moved back in January of '04."

"And Ginny did not come?"

Harry shook his head. "She was livid, as you can imagine. While I was away, I wrote her constantly. She rarely wrote me. In America, I learned two things - three things: First, my marriage - what there was of one - was over. Second, she never loved me, just my name. And third, I learned how to end it. It was there that I learned about the Annulment procedure. Apparently, the books that would have told me of it are banned in Britain - or at least they were."

"Did you - wait a minute. If I am not mistaken, your annulment would have happened while you were in the States."

Harry nodded. "I went back twice. First time was in late '02 to hire a solicitor and get the ball rolling. The second was in the spring of '03 for the hearing."

"I'm sorry, Harry," Hermione said. Harry looked and saw she was crying.

"Hermione?"

"All I've ever wanted was for you to be happy. To have the family you always wanted. And..."

"Hey," Harry said in a comforting voice, "it's not your fault."

"It is!"

"No, Love, it's not. Before the War ended, I lived a life that was not mine. I had no choices to make and no consequences to live from my choices. As much as I wanted otherwise, I knew I was destined to die in that War. Knew it since age twelve. Then, the War ends and by some miracle, some twist of fate, I survived. I now could make choices. I chose to get back together with Ginny. I chose to ignore how I really felt about you. I chose to let you go, even though I probably knew what I was losing. I made those choices and paid the price for them. My life since the War has been my own, however flawed and unsatisfying. It is not your fault, Hermione."

"But..."

"It's not. I don't know what would have happened if you had told me what you did in your letters when we were together. I really don't. I had never truly known love before or had a life of my own before and those were both things I should have had much earlier than I did. Maybe things would have been different. I don't know."

"I don't know how I would have reacted to your letter that first told me I was going to be a Dad. I'd like to think, had I seen it, I would have been on the next plane to Australia to find you. I don't know if I would have done what I now know would have been right. I just don't."

"I don't know if you would have come back to me had I told you then what I told you in my letters and today. I do know you would not come back if I married her. I knew that even back then. Hermione?"

"Y-yes?"

"When that door to that jet way closed, when that plane pushed back from the gate, it took a huge part of me with it. A part that I

knew I would never get again - until today." Harry took hold of her hands.

"Harry?" She whispered.

"You asked me why I kissed you earlier?"

She nodded.

"I need to know."

"What?"

"Whether the feelings I've had since you first spoke to me this morning were real, or was I in love with a memory."

"A-and?"

"I lost you, Hermione. I lost you a long time ago. Now that I found you, I am never going to lose you again. I still love you, Hermione. For the first time in a long time, I feel complete. I feel like I have finally come home. I never want to lose you again, Hermione."

"Harry?"

"Unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless there's someone else," Harry said with pain in his voice.

"Harry, there's no one else. There never has been. I have had dates, but most were turned off by the kids. Men, it seems, do not want instant families. The few who did not dump me after the first date - I always told my date about the children immediately - those few failed to live up to you, to what I had lost.

"When we kissed, Harry, I knew. I knew then - as if dreaming and thinking of you all the time for the last seven years was not enough of a clue - I knew I still love you. Damn it all!" Hermione began to cry.

"What's wrong," Harry asked with concern.

"I - I want this to work Harry. God knows I've not had much luck in romance. I have dreamt of you for years. I knew it was foolish. I knew you had gotten married and did not know your marriage had ended and I thought - I was certain that you were happy and finally had the life you deserved. I had wanted to be the one to give you that life, but it had not come out that way. I was happy for you, but you still haunted me. Now, now I see that I was wrong and that I can be the one for you.

"When you sat down with me at breakfast, I was worried, scared even. I had tried to hide my past because of all of the pain I had suffered. I was worried you might hate me for leaving and I wondered why you even bothered, considering I thought you were married. I was confused as well, because I thought you knew about Harry and Luna and did not want to be a part of their lives for some reason.

"Then, I learned you were no longer married. I learned you had not received my letters and did not know of our children. I learned that you had the same feelings for me that I had for you. We both were fools not to tell each other back then. Had you told me you loved me and would wait for me, I would have come back. But you never did - albeit because of a jealous redhead who shall go unnamed. Naturally, I thought you didn't really care about me. Now, I come to find that you did and you do. I want you back in my life, Harry. I want you to get to know your wonderful children. I hope we can become a family, the one you deserve. But how?"

"Hermione, I want you too. I hope we can have all of that. I don't know how. Not really. But, if we really want it, it can happen."

"It's hopeless, isn't it."

"No, Hermione. Not anymore. When I woke up this morning, a part of me hoped by some small miracle I would run into you today. Every time I am overseas, I hoped that. I hoped that when I was in Australia..."

"Australia? When were you there?"

"September 2000. A bunch of us were sent to augment magical security for the Summer Olympics."

"Really?"

Harry nodded.

"Were they wonderful?"

Harry shrugged. "Didn't see much of them to be honest. Still, I did manage to see a couple of events and the atmosphere was electric, to say the least."

"So you did not go there to find me?"

Harry shook his head. "Never really went looking. I did have a secret hobby, though."

"What's that?"

Harry pulled out his laptop and turned it on. "Almost from the day you left, I have collected 'Hermione clues.' Basically, if I ran across or found any information about you I kept it. At first, because I was concerned about you and wanted to know you were safe - and happy. After my marriage ended, there was a part of me that hoped to find you again and prayed that if I did, you would still be - well - available, I guess. I thought maybe, if I found a good lead, maybe I could find you again. Never got one."

"What kind of clues?"

"Newspaper articles mainly," Harry said. "I know the Daily Prophet is hardly a leader in the field of investigative journalism. Most of the stories about you are tabloid material. Still, there were some articles where some witch or wizard had been traveling abroad and claims to have seen you that I considered potentially credible. I've kept every one - every article about where you might be."

"Rita Skeeter's first article about your 'disappearance' where she opined that you apparated off the flight is the first one I kept, even though I knew it was rubbish. I had received your first letter and knew you had made it to Sydney. But I knew that even before I got your letter."

"How?"

"Did a little investigating on my own not days after you left. I was convinced in my mind you might not be coming back, but was still curious. So, on my own time I worked a fugitive trace."

"Magic?"

"Hardly. Standard law enforcement stuff we learned from the F.B.I. I verified you had purchased a one way ticket to Australia on British Airways. Given that you had no idea how long you search for your family would take, this was not alarming. I obtained the passenger manifest from the flight. Although it does not say you got off in Sydney, it was obvious the flight was not one passenger short on arrival and that you had not gotten off in Singapore.

"I then learned you were traveling on a British passport and had obtained a Resident Australian Visa that would allow you to remain in Australia indefinitely. You had arranged the Visa through Gringotts - as in all probability you could not have obtained one through normal channels. Suspicious, but again not alarming as again you had no idea how long you had to be there.

"The real clue came from the money trace."

"What's that?"

"The easiest way to track a fugitive is to follow their money. Money leaves a trail, unless the fugitive knows the one way not to, and apparently you did."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," Hermione said in mock innocence.

"The War had left you practically penniless. I know you wanted to leave in search of your parents right away, and I know Ron was against it. But, you were delayed anyway since you could not afford to. About a month after the War ended, you received a 50,000 Galleon reward from the Ministry for your part in the Final Victory."

"As did you."

"Ah, but I used all of it for charity."

"What charity."

"I'll tell you later."

More questions, Hermione thought.

"You did not use yours for charity. I thought you might, but you did not. You opened an account at Gringotts and paid for your final year at school and such. A couple of days after you broke up with Ron, you transferred almost your entire Gringotts account to the Bank of London. You did not exchange it for Pounds at Gringotts, rather you traded your Galleons at the market rate for gold at the Bank of London. This netted you an account well in excess of a million Pounds. Exchanging Galleons for Pounds was not surprising. Australia does not trade in Galleons. Most countries outside of Europe use the same monetary system as their Muggle counterparts. You needed Muggle money for your trip.

"What was a little odd was that you traded the Galleons rather than exchange them at Gringotts. Most witches and wizards are not that swift and are content with the fixed 5 to 1 exchange rate. But a Galleon is one ounce of pure gold and trades at thirty to forty times the Gringotts rate. Then again, that could have been attributed to your keen intellect and inherent practicality.

"But, the red flags then went off. Once you confirmed your Bank of London account, you made some purchases - such as your plane ticket and deposit on a hotel in Sydney and such, then wire transferred the remainder of your account offshore. Your entire account was transferred to a bank in Zurich, Switzerland - a numbered account and therefore untraceable. Although it is still possible to follow the money, to pick up the money trail again is both a case of a lucky break and a mistake on the part of the fugitive. That transaction told me you probably were not coming back, Hermione."

"Not bad work, Chief Inspector," Hermione chuckled. "Did you do any follow up?"

"When I was in Australia, I picked up the trail for a bit," Harry replied. "I verified that no one named Hermione Granger had cleared customs on the day your flight arrived, but that a Jane Granger with a resident Visa and British passport had come through customs from that flight. I figured you were traveling under your middle name. I

then was able to learn that 'Jane Granger' had made a doctor's appointment in Sydney around the middle of August, but the Doctor was on holiday, so I could get no information about that. Seemed routine. Next I learned that 'Jane Granger' booked a flight to Perth at the end of August and that the ticket was used.

"I then checked if Jane Granger, British passport had ever left Australia. She had not, so I figured you were still there. But, as I was married, that ended my search as there was also no record of Jane Granger being dead or anything else to cause concern. I also checked to see if two British subjects had left the country: Rose and Robert Granger or Wendell and Monica Wilkins. Again, no such records existed, so I figured you had a lead on your parents, but had not found them yet."

"Not bad, Potter," Hermione said. "And you were not really trying, were you?"

"Hobby, as I said," Harry replied. "I am certain that if it was a legitimate investigation, I would have caught you."

"Ah, but I was already long gone, super sleuth."

"Let me guess - your Mum, sister and you were traveling under Australian passports, yes?"

Hermione nodded.

"Had I been running a real investigation, I would have followed your trail to Perth, verified you were not there and that you had not traveled elsewhere in Australia, which would have led me to check other sources - such as whether you had managed to procure and Australian passport as well as checking security footage for you if the paper trail failed to provide a clue. But, I was certain you were still looking for your folks. I was just checking to see if you were okay, 'Mione."

"What about when you lived here?"

"I had no idea you might even be here, Hermione. Not until after I got back and even then it was a long shot."

"What do you mean?"

"As I said, I collected any clue I could find about your whereabouts. That includes every article written about your 'disappearance.' This includes all the ridiculous, speculative ones such as your being abducted by sex slavers, your being an extra-terrestrial, your being a conjured spell used to confuse the enemy during the war. There are loads of those, quite amusing really. But there were also scores of supposed eye witness stories about how Mrs. Smith of Cambridge thought she saw you while on Holiday in France or India or Japan or some such place.

"There were three articles that I thought might be relevant. Let me read them to you."

Hermione nodded.

By Rita Skeeter: Daily Prophet, 20 August 2000.

I am pleased to report that finally one of my many loyal readers has answered my request to provide any information regarding the possible whereabouts of our heroine, Ms. Hermione Granger who has not been seen in over a year. Unfortunately, her tale is over a year old, so maybe it is of no moment. Still, loyal readers, I shall report it for it is of interest.

Mrs. Hannah Bolton of Liverpool writes:

My husband Wilbur and I were on holiday in Australia a year ago in July. We were visiting Sydney and had decided to spend a day shopping. We went to the Billabong, Sydney's version of Diagon Alley and had just finished checking out a shop that specialized in Aboriginal magic when we saw a young woman leaving a shop that sold Muggle devices such as Puters and Fellytones and such. I recognized her immediately and pointed her out to Wilbur saying that wasn't that young lady the famous Hermione Granger? He agreed it had to be and I wanted to get her autograph, but Wilbur said she was probably on holiday herself and we decided to leave her alone. Had I known that she was on the run, well maybe I would

have stopped for a chat.

"That article," Harry said, "I was certain it was you. Now the next two I was certain were the same person, but until today that was all I was certain of. I now know it was you again."

By Rita Skeeter: Daily Prophet, 15 September 2000.

Yet another loyal reader think she may have run into the elusive Hermione Granger. Mrs. Emilia Dinkens of Dublin writes:

My husband Ian and I were on holiday last September in Perth Australia. One lovely morning, Ian proposed we take a stroll along the beach so we went to a small town called Shoalwater south of Perth. There were few others on the beach that morning, but one young woman caught our attention. I was sure it was the famous Hermione Granger, although she looked more pretty than in the photos I remember. She was carrying a

baby girl with her in her arms and pointing out shells and things to the little one. The girl was the spitting image of her Mum.

We walked up to her and introduced ourselves. She said her name was Janie and did not give a last name. She told us she had come to Australia to escape the war. There were many ex-pats in Australia, we learned. She introduced her daughter Daphne - although she never used the word "daughter." Daphne is an adorable child and it was clear her Mum was quite proud and taken with her. The young woman had a British accent, so we thought it might be her. But she told us her daughter was born 10 April '98, so that can't be her, can it?

I mean, April 10, '98 was just a few days after the Golden Trio was captured and brought to Malfoy Manor (according to the official history) and Hermione - lovely girl - was brutally tortured by that Bellatrix! The official history was vile enough! It was clear that poor Hermione was to be gang raped and murdered after Bellatrix was through with her. As horrible as that history is, how much worse would it have been had Hermione been

expecting or had she just recently given birth? No. It could not be her. But we did enjoy a pleasant visit with the charming young woman and her lovely daughter.

"I remember that couple," Hermione said. "I never told them Daphne was my daughter, but I know they assumed she was. I figured they'd then think I was someone else."

Harry nodded. "They did. Rita did not. She figured it all made sense. The Malfoy's had gotten off light for their role in the War and Rita wrote article after article accusing the Ministry of being as corrupt as ever and covering up the truth about your torture and even suggesting that you were snuck out of the country because you were about to expose the whole scandal."

"That's just silly," Hermione chuckled.

"It was. But people believed, Hermione. Ginny believed it was true and I had a time for a while as she accused each of Ron and me of fathering the love child. I asked Ginny flat out, how could she assume this was true when you had roomed with her at school all the next year. She said you never told her everything. I then asked what you had done with this supposed child and she said 'relatives' must be caring for it. She could never say who, but she was sure it was true."

"That's just mental!"

Harry nodded. "That was Ginny."

"What was your take on that one? Did you think it was me?"

"At the time, I thought it might be you, but I had no way of explaining the baby. Most likely, I thought it a case of mistaken identity."

Hermione nodded.

"Several years later, Janie appeared again. I was certain it was the same woman as the one in Perth, but not certain at all that it might be you."

By Rita Skeeter: Daily Prophet, 2 February 2005.

Yet another loyal reader think she may have run into the elusive Hermione Granger. Mrs. Anna Marie Torelli of Bath writes:

My son Ferdinand and his new wife Gloria fled this land during the War. I had not heard from them in years and feared the worst. Last year, my son wrote me and told me he and his wife had settled in the United States in a city called St. Louis. They were doing very well - thank you - and had three lovely children and invited my husband and I to visit them and meet the new grandchildren. Alas, my Albert passed only a few months earlier. Dragon Pox.

I went for the Christmas Holidays. I arrived several weeks early and enjoyed an American tradition called Thanksgiving. The next day, Gloria took me shopping for Christmas presents for the children and for my son. We went to a place called Soulard, which is the Diagon Alley of St. Louis. It's actually quite a lovely shopping district and I swear Weasleys has a store there!

Anyway, I noticed this fetching young woman with three children on her own and I swear it must have been Hermione Granger! She looked a lot like Ms. Granger. I could not help myself. I walked up and said hi and she seemed a little flustered, although it was hard to tell if it was because I had said hi, or because of the three little ones. There were two little girls and a boy. She introduced herself as Janie and said the older girl was Daphne and the younger two were twins: Harry and Luna. She said the younger two were named after heroes in the War. I asked her why she named the lovely, blonde headed girl Luna and she said it was because she was blonde and also because she really did not like the names Hermione and Ginerva - the other two heroes.

She was an ex-pat who had fled the Muggleborn registration, just as my son had done for his wife. I asked about her husband and she said she had lost him some time ago. It was sad, really. But they seemed like a happy family.

"I don't remember that one," Hermione said. "I'm not saying it did not happen. The day after Thanksgiving is a huge shopping day and Mum and I usually take the kids along. My guess is Mum was in a shop and I was more concerned of keeping the kids nearby than about a conversation with a total stranger. What did you think at the time?"

"I was certain the St. Louis Janie and the Perth Janie were the same woman. I wondered about Harry and Luna, though. Harry I could understand. Became a bloody popular name after the war, you see.

But Luna? She was famous in Britain for her part in the war, but not elsewhere. She's better known as a naturalist and wildlife conservationist abroad these days than for what she did to win the War."

CHAPTER TWELVE

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"So," Hermione said as she and Harry were looking at the menu in the restaurant, "what are you going to have?"

"I'm thinking the bar-be-que spare ribs."

"Really? Not the steak?"

"I will have an opportunity to try that some other evening, won't I?"

"Well, I am going to have a steak," Hermione said.

The waiter arrived. "Are you ready to order?"

Harry waited for Hermione to order first. "The nine once bourbon steak," she said, "medium rare. Baked potato with butter and sour cream, the house vegetables and a side salad."

"Dressing?"

"Vinaigrette."

"Drink?"

"A nice glass of Merlot, I should think."

"An excellent choice, Ma'am. Sir?"

"The blackened catfish, baked potato with butter, sour cream and chives, a bowl of your onion soup, cajun veggies and a salad. Blue cheese dressing, please."

"And to drink?"

"Guinness?"

"Yes Sir," and the waiter departed.

"I thought you were going to have the ribs," Hermione said.

"Changed my mind. I might try them, but I still think I make the best ribs around, so there you go."

"You make the best ribs?"

"Indeed. Many think so."

"Look, I know you cook, but ribs? I mean you are talking slow smoked, right?"

Harry nodded.

"When did you learn that?"

"Atlanta. Fell in with the 'wrong crowd' practically off the bat. One of the Agents I knew from the office competed in ribs competitions all over the South. Did quite well, really. He taught me because I loved his ribs. Course, he never told me the details of his spice rubs or sauces. No self respecting ribs chef ever does! But, I built a pit out back of my house and came up with my own recipes. Teddy and I loved them, as did our guests. When I moved back, I started hosting an annual picnic at Potter Manor - my grandparents place I inherited. Most of us who went to the states cook for all the guests. I do ribs and brisket. Ernie and his wife, who were in Boston, do lobsters and flounder, cod, chowder and such. Michelle Martin was in New Orleans and does some nice cajun dishes. Draco and his wife do a mean Texas chili, and there are others as well. I invite my friends and, of course, the Severus School families. It's always a wonderful time.

"There's music and dancing into the night. I have a Quidditch Pitch, a Football Pitch and a baseball field for games and such. Teddy is a huge baseball fan - as am I. My marriage to Ginny pretty much ruined my interest in Quidditch. In Atlanta, I went to baseball games, as well as college football and basketball. Even on a bad year, Georgia Tech is usually better than the Atlanta pro teams in those sports. Teddy is a huge Chipper Jones fan..."

"Guess we'll have to work on that," Hermione laughed. "Your son Harry is a huge Albert Pujols fan. As far as he and Luna and Daphne are concerned, it's the St. Louis Cardinals and everyone else."

"Could be worse," Harry quipped. "At least they're not Yankees fans."

Hermione laughed. "Heaven forbid!"

Their salads arrived and Harry decided to change the subject. "So, what are you here to sell this week?"

"Why are you changing the subject," Hermione asked?

"Cause I want to be able to justify this meal as a legitimate business expense," Harry deadpanned. He was not totally serious. Really, he wanted a less emotional conversation during dinner.

Hermione chuckled. "Good point, but if that's the case, this meal is Dutch. I am on an expense account as well."

"Deal."

"Let me ask you this, Harry. What are you here to consider buying?"

"We are looking for things that could enhance our capabilities that we cannot get from our usual suppliers. Plus, if there are things that are substantially better than what our usual suppliers carry or offer, we might be interested."

"What sort of things?"

"We get most of our magical equipment and supplies from Weasley Enterprises. You are familiar with them, right?"

"Of course. And I can say we are not in direct competition with them. Not really. They are one of the best in the world, although for some reason they have yet to make a dent in the U.S. market - aside from their joke shops and retail stores. Even then, Mortensen Products based in Bristol Connecticut makes similar product lines. As a marketing type, I purchase those products and help evaluate whether we can come up with a significant improvement. We are working on some, but should Weasley ever cross the pond, we doubt we could compete. We have our own niche, however, where we feel we have no competitors. Well, not any good ones."

"And what's that?"

"In general, we develop magic / technological hybrids. We take the best of both worlds, combine them in creative ways and come up with products that are better than you might be able to find anywhere. Most of our equipment is in the medical field, but we have other products specifically developed for sale to magical law enforcement and researchers."

"We might be on the same page, Hermione. I am here to recommend to my superiors various technologies that would enhance our investigative abilities, provided such technologies exist."

"Such as?"

"In general, we are shopping for top of the line, cutting edge laboratory equipment for our forensics lab. That shopping list can be quite extensive as we are looking to add or upgrade across the board. We are also looking for surveillance technologies: optical, acoustic, electromagnetic, communications, magical and so on."

"We may have things you'd be interested in."

"You understand, of course, I am here merely to recommend purchases. The bean counters and tech types would make the final recommendations before a contract was actually let."

"That's not all that unusual, Harry. It works that way here whenever we seek a government contract. Still, the F.B.M.I. is one of our major customers."

"Really?"

She nodded.

"If you do up a proposal, you will need to include that information, if you can. If it's good enough for the F.B.M.I., that's a big selling point, assuming we don't already have it."

"You probably don't. Not from us, Harry. While our business is doing well, I am here to try and get foreign contracts. This is our first real foray onto the international market. Could be a big deal for us - and

I'll confess a huge feather in my cap - if we make a splash here and can expand into the European and Asian markets."

"Understand, Hermione, I can't promise that we'll actually make any purchases," Harry said as their salads were cleared away and their dinner set before them. "But, I would like to look over a product catalog between now and Monday, if that's okay with you."

"No problem."

"Hopefully, I could have a proposal request to you before this conference even begins, although no promises there."

"I understand. I do appreciate it. Still."

"What?"

"Well, what if your boss finds out about me? What if he finds out we have a relationship of a non-professional nature, one I think we both want to explore? Won't that be a deal killer?"

"There are check and balances, Hermione. My recommendations are just that. They will be evaluated independently. If your company's products are the best available, the fact that you and I may have romantic intentions should not be a factor. In fact, should they learn that I was buying from the famous Hermione Granger, 'Brightest Witch of Her Age,' and such, that might actually enhance your company's chances."

"You don't have to do that for me, Harry. Honestly."

"If your products stand on their own merits, I would hardly be doing you a favor, just doing my job. I am here to find the best stuff available. If your's is the best, I would have justified the expense of this trip."

For the rest of their dinner, they talked about food and Hermione's company's products. Harry knew he had hit a potential jackpot with Pak Riley. They made most of the products Harry's bosses were interested in as well as several he believed they would be had they known such products existed. Harry was particularly intrigued by what Hermione had called a Pensive Database Management System.

"What's that?"

"It's like a computer program for Pensieve memories. You store the memories in the database and a program organizes all the information and memories in any way you think would be most efficient for retrieval. Say, for example, you want to study all references in the Database regarding Voldemort's relationship with a particular crony. Rather than search all memories, you input the retrieval parameters and only those memories that are related to the search criteria are retrieved."

"Bloody hell! How does it do that?"

"Sorry, Harry. Trade secret. But I can assure you it works. I was one of the lead researchers on that one."

"Really?"

She nodded. "Research is the reason I was hired. I got into marketing because I proved good at that as well and know these products and who and why they work better than just about anyone."

Harry nodded. "You have any idea how many manhours a device like that could save?"

"We've made projections. Not hour by hour, but we figure it would reduce a pensieve search time by over ninety percent, freeing up Agents for more productive work."

"Damn strait it would. Look! That's something I am sure we would want. We waste days on that sort of investigating. We have actually missed some chances 'cause we were bogged down in the Pensieve Search. Even if we buy nothing else - and that probably won't happen based upon what you've told me - we certainly would give that system serious consideration."

"It's not cheap."

"Considering the man-hour savings, it's probably worth its price, Hermione."

"That is our thinking as well."

"I see you've been taking notes," Harry said. "I assume it's about what I have expressed an interest in?"

Hermione nodded.

"You have at least a sample of all of those products here?"

"And more besides them, yes. I assume you shall want a demonstration this week?"

"Far be it for me to buy sight unseen. But, you can consider that list my initial proposal request."

"Feel free to add to it," Hermione laughed.

"I will."

Harry continued to ask her about her work for the remainder of the meal. He had forgotten just how much he enjoyed her voice and her passion for knowledge. He soaked up everything she said with a silly smile on his face that she could not help but notice. Hermione had forgotten what it was like to have someone to talk to like Harry. We will make this work somehow, she decided somewhere between finishing her steak and the arrival of her cheesecake dessert.

Once they had finished and charged their meals to their accounts, they walked back into the atrium. They each ordered a cup of coffee to keep them awake following their large dinner - and keep Harry awake as it was already past midnight in London and he was still adjusting to the time change.

"Harry?" Hermione then asked.

"Hmm?"

"In your letters, you spoke about Lavender a lot. Why? Surely you must know how that would have made me feel."

"Honestly?"

Hermione nodded.

"At first it was because I really felt sorry for her. I know Ron and she crushed you, but I was shocked that he could be even worse to her than he was to you. He bordered on cruelty which was not something I would have believed he was capable of - even if he did not have any feelings for her at all. What I could not for the life of me understand was how or why she put up with that.

"It was a little after Christmas in '99 and I was shopping in Diagon Alley by myself. I saw Lavender with her new daughter sitting on a bench, crying her eyes out. I was sure Ron had done something else to hurt her and - I don't know - I stopped and sat down with her. We began talking. We eventually became friends and I learned I had her all wrong. We both did, Hermione."

"What do you mean?"

"We both assumed she knew about you from the beginning. She did not."

"That's impossible!"

"She didn't."

"Our engagement was in all the papers!"

"Lavender left the country not long after the War ended. She and her family needed to get away so they went camping in British Columbia for months. Never saw a paper. Never read about the engagement. They came back in early September, by then your engagement was old news.

"She bumped into Ron her first week back in Diagon Alley. She still had a crush on him, you know. More than a crush, really. He asked her out practically the moment after they said hello to each other. She was ecstatic. She conceded she was a little over eager as she slept with him on their first date. Claims she could not help herself. He made the pass, she let him.

"They saw each other once or twice a week during the fall and usually wound up at Ron's flat for the evening. She worried it was going too fast, but could not help herself because she was falling in love with the Git. He never spoke of you around her. He made her

feel as if she was the sun, stars and heavens - as if she was his whole world."

"She MUST have learned about me at some point!"

Harry nodded. "Right around the Christmas Holidays in '98. She wanted to spend time with his family to get to know them and wanted him to spend time with hers. She was certain he felt the same way about her as she did about him, even though he never said so. To her surprise, he said he could not. He had commitments and felt it was too soon and such. She was devastated.

"To my surprise, Lavender had not seen much of Parvati since she got back and had not spoken to Parvati about Ron. After Ron and Lav I (as she calls our Sixth Year) she was a bit embarrassed. Parvati had been against the relationship from the beginning and could not understand what Lavender could have seen in Ron. Harry? That was obvious. But Ron? Parvati thought he was a Git."

"Parvati may act stupid, but it's only an act," Hermione said.

"Anyway," Harry continued, "she had lunch with Parvati and spilled her guts to her friend. She kept Ron's name out of it at first, she said. Eventually, though, she told Parvati who was tearing her apart. Parvati flipped out apparently. (I have spoken with Parvati and she says she was livid.) She told Lavender that Ron was engaged to you and had been since June."

"And Lavender did nothing about that, did she," Hermione said in disgust.

"On the contrary," Harry replied. "She let Ron have it. Told him he was the world's biggest loser, that no man worth anything would string two women along the way he had, that not even Malfoy was that heartless or cruel and told him he had three choices: dump you, dump her or get dumped by both of you. She told him that if he did not make a decision, she was going to tell you and she knew you would not stand for it and, get this, out of her respect for you, she would dump him too. She loved him, but would not stand for that."

"Then how come..."

"Ron lied to her. He told her right after you went back to school that he had broken up with you. She did not know he had lied about it until that day you walked in on them."

"That would mean," Hermione began...

"Lavender did not get pregnant on purpose. It was an accident. She cannot explain how, except she knows Ron had been away on assignment for a while and they had a huge party when he came back. She barely remembers it. They were both pretty drunk. She guessed that because he returned unexpectedly, she had forgotten to take her daily birth control potion and she does know it was the wrong time of the month to forget such things and..."

"And, go off the potion, even for a day, if she is ovulating conception is practically certain."

"Unless he was shooting blanks," Harry added, "which is seems was not the case. She did not tell him about it. Part of her hoped he would eventually figure it out, but if he didn't she was going to go off on another 'family vacation' and have the child anyway. She did not want to tell him about their child unless he made it clear he wanted to marry her."

"So she was not trying to trap him."

Harry shook his head. "No."

SATURDAY - JUNE 26, 1999 - RONALD WEASLEY'S FLAT 67B
DIAGON ALLEY, LONDON, U.K.

"Hmmm," Lavender sighed as she and Ronald recovered from yet another intense love making session, "that was wonderful!"

"I'm pretty good, aren't I," Ron said with an annoying smugness.

"The best," she agreed, although she wish he was not so full of himself. She also wished he'd get a clue and figure out her increasing belly was not because she was eating too much. He had noted she was eating more than she used to. She had to, she knew. Still, she wished he would figure out that she was not really getting fat. How can he be so thick, she wondered. If he did not figure this out soon, Plan B - go off and have their child without him - would

become necessary. She did not want to do that, but did not want him to think she got this way on purpose either.

"Lav?"

"Yes My Love?"

"Erm, I am expecting Ginny to pop by when she gets in."

"Oooh! I haven't seen her in so long," Lavender cooed with excitement. While she and Ginny were hardly friends, they were not enemies either and she like Ginny. "But I thought she'd go and see Harry."

"She will. But Mum insists she spends time with the family first."

"I'm glad you are beginning to see me that way, Ronald. I do love you so much, you know."

"Erm..."

"What," she asked with suspicion. He's not about to hide us again, is he?

"Erm, Ginny might not be the best way to do that. In fact, I am sure she'll freak out unless we break this to her slowly."

"I can help do that, Ron. I mean, I did not mean we sit here naked when she arrives..."

"That's not what I meant."

"You - you are not asking me to leave, are you?"

"She won't understand, Lav. She won't."

"What's not to understand. You're not with Hermione anymore. Why can't you have a girlfriend - especially one who loves you as much as I do?"

"She's - um - she's still mad at me for dumping Hermione, Lav. She wants to throttle whatever tart caught my eye - her words."

"It's been months..."

"The girl knows how to stay angry, Lav. Trust me. I need more time with her, okay?"

"Ronald! We are a couple. We are in love..."

"I know, Dear but..."

"I told you months ago, I don't want to be hidden from your world. It's been one excuse after another, hasn't it?"

"I did mean anything. It's just..."

"She hates me, doesn't she? She hates me for Sixth Year?"

"I don't know."

"Ronald?"

"Please?" Ron pleaded! "Please? Just give me time to break this to her gently, okay?"

"Fine," Lavender said in a hurt voice. "I can't change who you are. I'll have to accept it." She started to get up.

"What are you doing?" Ron asked.

"I am going up stairs, get my clothes and go home."

"She won't be here for hours, Lav," Ron begged.

"I'm going upstairs! But," she said in a softer voice, "if you're a good boy and make me feel special, I might stick around a little longer."

"I will be."

"Promises, promises," Lavender giggled. It was hard for her to stay mad at Ron for long. Together, they walked from the living room to the head of the stairs. They were greeted by blood red words plastered on the wall by the front door:

YOU CHEATING BASTARD!

IT'S OVER!

I WOULDN'T MARRY YOU IF YOU WERE

THE ONLY MAN LEFT ON EARTH!

BURN IN HELL, LIAR!

HERMIONE

(DON'T EVEN THINK I WILL EVER LISTEN TO YOU AGAIN!)

On the floor was what looked like a diamond engagement ring.

Ron looked at Lavender who glared daggers at him.

"YOU LYING BASTARD," she screamed! "YOU TOLD ME IT WAS OVER!"

"I," Ron began, but was cut short when Lavender slapped him hard across his face, hard enough to cause him to tear up.

"I AM NOT YOUR FUCKING MISTRESS, WEASLEY! I THOUGHT YOU LOVED ME! OBVIOUSLY, I WAS WRONG!"

"Lav..."

"DON'T 'LAV' ME YOU FUCKING BASTARD! I LOVE YOU! HOW COULD YOU? HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?"

"I..."

"SHUT UP! I told you months ago, Weasel. You had three choices: me, Hermione or neither of us. You've made your choice. I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!" It was not true, but neither did she want to be his mistress.

"Lavender, please," Ron begged?

"You want me? Then marry me you bastard. Otherwise, it's over."

"I - I can't."

"Have a nice life." She then turned, ran up the stairs in tears and as soon as she picked up her clothes, disappeared to her flat without even bothering to get dressed.

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Hermione knew Harry was telling the truth. Ron might have been able to lie to her, Harry never had.

"All these years, Hermione said softly, "all these years I thought she was nothing but a trollop."

Harry nodded. "I had a low opinion of her as well, remember?"

Hermione nodded.

"It was only later when we became friends that she told me what really had happened. She never wanted to be the 'other woman,' Hermione. She hated that and hated him for treating her that way."

"But..."

"But," Harry agreed. "She also loved him more than anything. She wanted him to get off the fence. That's all she wanted - although she hoped he would choose her. He lied to her and to you. Her problem was she was pregnant with his child, and being a single mother scared her to death. That and she still loved him. The funny thing was that it seemed Ron loved her too, although he was terrified about that. Years later she told me. Ron had fallen in love, but was supposed to be with you. It's what everyone - except Lavender - wanted and expected of him."

"That makes no sense," Hermione began.

"You recall you said he had the emotional range of a teaspoon?"

Hermione laughed, remembering the time she had said that.

"Not sure if that was true," Harry said. "But he was worse at recognizing, accepting and truly expressing his emotions than I was. And that is saying a lot."

"I suppose."

"That, and he was an immature, insecure little git and perhaps the most selfish person I ever knew. Not even Malfoy in his bad days was as bad as Ron was then. He thought he deserved everything for what he did in the War and such and clearly used his fame to satisfy his need for gratification, not caring who he hurt in the process."

"And Lavender still loved him?"

Harry nodded. "She knew it was a phase - one day he might wise up and grow out of it. As painful as it was, she wanted to be there for him when he did because she also saw things in Ron that were not petty and would be wonderful, she believed, once he realized he should not care about what the world thought of him and learn to just accept himself for who he truly was inside. She thought that Ron had the potential to be a great person - not famous, not necessarily rich and famous, but a wonderful person and that was the Ron she was willing to wait for and for whom she was willing to suffer the pain the immature Ron could unknowingly and unerringly dole out to those who loved him and were his friends. She was willing to suffer and wait for him to grow up."

"She truly loves him, doesn't she?" Hermione said.

Harry nodded. "Yes she does. Probably like you, I thought she was a bit of gossipy, shallow ditz. She can still come across that way. Very few people are allowed to see her for what she really is. Honestly, I think that list is Parvati, Luna, me and now Ron. She is quite an impressive woman, Hermione. Ron really did not know what he was playing at when he was messing things up with the both of you. I know you hated her, but she never felt that way about you. She felt sorry for you. Ron had no excuse for the way he treated you, in her opinion. She wanted him, but did not want him to hurt you at all. She believes Ron saw you as a prize and as what others expected from him, but should have seen you as the friend you had been. She believes that once you and Ron began dating, he stopped seeing you as a friend and stopped treating you as a friend and saw you as an entitlement."

"She might be right," Hermione whispered.

"She also believed that regardless of whether he truly had romantic feelings for you or not, you did not deserve that. You were, in her opinion, more of a victim than she was. She was willing to put up with his immaturity and even his infidelity, as painful as it was. She knew you would not and felt he should have known that and done the right thing - whatever that was - at the outset: either pick her or you, not string both along and think he should get away with it."

"Did she know about his other affairs?"

"I know she suspected," Harry said. "She told me not to tell her if I knew, but she suspected. Until he grew up, he was going to be a git, she said. She prayed it would be sooner rather than later. It hurt her that he could be so callous. It hurt her that he could be unfaithful, but she actually felt sorry for the other women as well. They deserved better than Ron, she thought."

"She's a doormat."

"I thought so too. Now, I realize she is anything but. What she saw in Ron, I don't know. But she saw something and knew one day it would come and was patient enough to wait. She says it did when she was pregnant with her second child, a little girl named Molly. Something happened. Maybe only Ron and Lavender know what, but during that pregnancy everything changed. Ron seemed content for the first time in his life when Molly was born and Lavender finally seems happy, like the man she saw hidden has finally arrived. She won't tell me or Parvati anything. One day, she says, Ron will explain everything. But since I left Ginny, I never see him."

"And Lavender?"

"We're still friends, although she no longer needs someone to talk to like she once did. Now, it's all about our kids. We get together with Parvati and discuss parenting and such. You ever notice parents seem to love that stuff?"

Hermione nodded.

"They seem happy - or at least she does," Harry said. "I think it's genuine, because she did not hide her discontent regarding immature Ron from me or from Parvati. I hope it's true considering."

"Considering?"

"Ron and Lav seem to be giving Ron's folks a run for the money in the baby department."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Their first child, Gabrielle, was born 19 December 1999, early in the morning after the disaster that was my wedding day. Molly was born 29 July 2001. Rosie was born on Valentine's Day 2003. Arthur was born on Halloween 2004. They seemed to take a little time off for a bit. But now she's pregnant again with their fifth child who is due early next year. Even before Ron 'grew up,' Lav says he was always a wonderful father - although she thinks he spoils them too much."

"It sounds like you're impressed with her, Harry."

"A part of me always wondered why she was in Gryffindor," Harry nodded. "Neville, Ron, Dean, Seamus, you and even Parvati were physically brave on more than one occasion. I know Lav fought bravely in the Final Battle and nearly died. I know that. But, it always seemed physical bravery was not her thing. She is brave, though, in a different way. I am not her equal in that category. She will risk a broken heart, something I have never consciously done. My heart has been broken, but not by a choice I knew would lead to it. She is gone where angels fear to tread in that regard time and time again."

"If we work out as a couple, Hermione, promise me you thank her?"

"Why?"

"It was her example of such emotional courage that - well that compelled me to take the risk and sit down with you this morning. Had I not known her, I might have said hello, but I certainly would not have given you my heart and a chance to crush it. You could have, Hermione. I would have expected that to an extent. You did not. If - no when this works, thank her for me and for us."

"You were scared?"

"Terrified, Hermione. In a way, I'd rather have faced Voldemort and his entire army again. But I had to tell you what I felt and what I still feel. She would have if she was in a similar circumstance."

"Are you glad you did?"

Harry nodded. "I am. I really am. I still love you, Hermione. I really do."

"I still love you too, Harry. And I am glad you came over. Although, to be honest, you scared the shit out of me at first."

Harry nodded.

"I thought you must hate me."

"And I thought you must have hated me."

"Turns out we were both wrong."

"In a wonderful way," Harry added.

"Wonderful!" Hermione then leaned across the table and kissed him. He could see her eyes glisten with tears. He was sure he was and, while bawling their eyes out seemed like something to do, he really wanted to hear about something else.

To change the topic, Harry then asked Hermione to tell him about the children. She spent the next couple of hours telling him everything she could think of about "their" two children. That was the easy part. She was a mother and had every reason to be proud of Harry and Luna. Like most parents, her children were one of her favorite topics of conversation.

She did her best to bring Harry up to speed. She told him about their birthdays, and each Christmas. She told him that they still believed in Santa Claus, as Father Christmas was known over here, but that they were beginning to question his existence. They were very smart and there were just enough gaps in the story for them to ask increasingly difficult questions. The only reason they had not deduced he was imaginary was because they, like their parents, were magical. Harry and Luna were a young wizard and witch just like their Mom and Dad and they knew it.

She told Harry about their first word ("Mama") and the first time they expressed magic. Harry was a little over a year old. His teddy bear

(he later named "Bonkers") had been taken away from him because he was teasing his sister with it. He was angry and wanted Bonkers back. Hermione had left the room to start a load of laundry and when she came back, Harry was happily hugging his Bonkers.

Luna was different, she told Harry. She had "manifested" at six months and it was not out of anger or fear or frustration as it was with most young magical children. She was also harder to detect, not because she wasn't magical, but because the magic she manifested was rare indeed. Hermione remembered that her sister Daphne had been really upset about something and remembered that she was inconsolable. She remembered that Luna watched her intently with an odd, sympathetic expression and Daphne had suddenly calmed down and then began to laugh. Luna, it seems, was an empath. She had the ability without knowing how to use her magic to make people feel better.

She told Harry how their children were reading by the age of four and both seemed happier with a book than sitting in front of the television - unless it was for a favorite movie. They had several favorites. She told him how they had just finished Kindergarten at a non-magical school and how they were well ahead of their classmates but had lots of friends. She knew their children differed from the parents in that respect. She told him how they were excited about starting First Grade - and explained the differences between primary and secondary education in the U.S. and Britain when it was clear he did not understand the term. She told him that they would start Magic School in the fall. She explained that here in the U.S., magical children start learning magic at age six and not eleven as it had been for her and Harry. They would get their wands at age eight. As she understood it, by the time Harry and Luna were eleven, they would know as much magic as would an average student at Harry and Hermione's secondary school after their third year - at least in the core courses. And, unlike in Britain, the children could practice magic at home - under adult supervision, of course.

Harry was a little disappointed to learn that his formerly favorite sport - Quidditch - was not very popular in the U.S., although many magical children did play. They learned to fly brooms in Second Grade and could start Youth League in the Third Grade. Most U.S. magical children also played non-magical sports. Harry and Luna both played soccer, which is what the Americans call football. Americans have their own kind of football that looked like it was

even more dangerous than Quidditch even without the flying. Harry and Luna also played Tee ball, a beginners form of baseball. They were both good at it. They also knew how to swim - a skill Harry had never learned. Luna was also in ballet, Hermione added and explained what that was.

Harry asked Hermione what their favorite team was. He was thinking Quidditch and Hermione knew that. She told him that the St. Louis Vipers were the professional Quidditch team, but they were even more pathetic than the Chuddeley Cannons. The magical sports writers said the only reason the team existed at all was because the owner used it as a huge tax write off. No. Harry's children's favorite sports team was the St. Louis Cardinals just like their Aunt Daphne. Somebody named Albert Pujols was their favorite player and then Hermione spent time explaining baseball to Harry as Harry and Ron had once tried to explain Quidditch to her. Harry subtly reminded her that he and Teddy knew all about baseball and were Atlanta Braves fans. He agreed with her that he really liked baseball.

"Oh my," she finally said. "We've been talking for close to two hours!"

"Really?" Harry replied. He had not noticed. He also really had no plans - not really. "I don't mind," he added.

"You sure?"

Harry nodded.

Hermione then began to tell Harry about her first trip to Disney World with the kids two summers ago and how much they loved it. They went again last summer and Hermione was planning to go again sometime before school started again.

"Teddy loves Disney World too," Harry said. "I took him there in 2003 and we had a marvelous time. We went back in '04 and '05 and I am sure he'd kill me if we don't go back this summer. Wait a minute!"

"What?"

"You asked earlier how we can make this work, right?"

She nodded.

"How much vacation time do you usually take?"

"Three weeks in the summer and Christmas."

"Three weeks. Okay. I have an idea. My annual picnic is scheduled for the weekend of July 29th. Suppose you and your Mum and the kids come to Britain and spend about a week with me at the Manor? Then, we all fly to St. Louis, spend some time there. Gives you a chance to show that Teddy and I might want to consider changing our allegiance if there's a baseball game or two we could see. Then we could all head down to Disney World."

"Sounds wonderful, Harry. But I am not sure Mum and I could afford to go to Britain."

"As my guests, I would insist on paying for that part of the trip."

"I'll think about it."

"Sounds like only a maybe," Harry pouted.

"It's more than a maybe," Hermione whispered. "I would love to. It's just not an absolute certainty yet, is all. But for now, I think I have my summer vacation planned - just not in detail. Okay?"

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For wanting to be a part of my life again."

"It's all I have ever really wanted, Harry." She then leaned in and kissed him. The kiss seemed to have no end in sight, but Hermione's cell phone rang and she groaned as she broke contact.

"You're early," Hermione said to whomever was calling. "Yes. Right. In a bit." She hung up. "Harry?"

"Hmmm."

"I've got to go to my room for a bit but I will be back. Promise me you'll wait here for me?"

"What? Why?"

"It's a surprise." She smiled.

"A good one?"

"I think you'll love it," she added.

"Okay. I will wait. Maybe have another cup of coffee."

"Thanks Harry." She leaned in and kissed him again. "You won't regret it, I promise. Back in a bit." Hermione smiled at him and then stood and seemed to hurry away. Harry's eyes remained fixed on her and a part of him hoped she wasn't running away. He knew she was not, still. He was so focused on Hermione, he did not notice that someone else had joined him at the table. When she finally disappeared in the direction of the elevators, his trance broke and he regained an awareness for his surroundings. He nearly jumped when he saw he was not alone. He recognized his new companion immediately - the red hair and curious blue eyes were a dead giveaway.

"Bloody hell," Harry almost yelled. "You damn near gave me a heart attack! What the bloody hell are you doing here, Weasley?" There was clearly hostility in Harry's voice.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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Ron Weasley said nothing, seemingly taken aback at the obvious hostility. Harry saw Ron pale and recognized that Ron wanted to leave - fast. Harry noted the hesitation and realized Ron was not alone. Next to him was Lavender - Harry's friend and Ron's wife.

"Sorry," he said to Lavender. "Bit of a shock." This is turning out to be one weird day, Harry thought.

"Didn't mean to startle you, Harry," Lavender said. "It's we who should be sorry."

"Was that who I think it was," Ron began. There was then an "oof" as Harry watched Lavender elbow Ron in the ribs.

"We did not come over to grill Harry on his social life, did we Dear?" She said, implying and obvious answer.

"N-no," Ron replied.

Interesting, Harry thought to himself. Seems Ron really did get more than he bargained for.

"Again," Harry said, still on the defensive, "is this meeting a coincidence?"

"I'm here for the conference," Ron said. "And you?"

"Same."

"I thought Parker was supposed to come."

"His wife went into premature labor," Harry replied. "The Boss sent me in his stead."

"Ah. I was to remind Parker - and now I guess you - Weasley Enterprises is looking towards expanding our markets overseas, not negotiating additional contracts with the Ministry."

"Parker did advise me of that, Ron." Of course, Harry thought bitterly, Parker did not tell him Ron might be here. "And you Lavender?"

"Ron's been all on about New York since he began expanding the retail stores into this country. Bloody hell, Harry, his efforts more than quadrupled the size of the company. Mostly, he's over and back from our American corporate headquarters in Chicago or from someplace else. I've been to Chicago several times. I've been dying to so what he's all on about! So, we decided to make a trip of it."

"What about your kids?" Harry asked.

"They're upstairs. My Mum came along to help. While my Ronald is off wheeling and dealing this week, Mum, I and the kids will be seeing the sights and such. Once the conference is over, we're to Chicago for a week and to Disney World! I can't wait!"

"We're going to the Yankees' game tomorrow," Ron added.

"You know baseball?"

"Got hooked on the game over the past few years. You?"

Harry nodded. "Please don't tell me you're a Yankees fan."

"Merlin forbid! Chicago Cubs!"

"Really?"

"Come on, Harry. I'm a dyed in the wool Cannons fan back home. How could I not cheer for the team that has the longest streak without a title game - or World Series appearance - in the sport and has been without a tile for almost a hundred years?"

"Good point, I guess."

"You?"

"Atlanta Braves."

"They make the playoffs and then choke," Ron said.

"But they make the playoffs," Harry countered.

"Boys," Lavender interrupted, although she seemed to be pleased that the two had lightened up at the banter.

"Sorry, Lav," Ron said. "Boys and their sports. But, maybe you'll see tomorrow."

"Who are the Yankees playing?" Harry asked.

"Washington Nationals, used to be the Expos."

Harry nodded. "Worst in the National League. I hope they kick Yankees ass!"

"Makes two of us, Harry!"

"Alright Ron, that's enough," Lavender said.

"W-what?"

"I did not bring you over here to pry into Harry's social life - although I admit, Harry, I too am curious. Nor did I bring you over here to talk about sports, right?"

"I suppose," Ron replied meekly.

"Why did I bring you over here?"

"I'm - I'm not ready..."

"You probably never will be."

"What - what if it changes nothing?"

"You expect things to change between you and Harry? I doubt they will, Ronald. But you will feel better about yourself in the end, and that is a change for the better, right?"

"I suppose," Ron sighed. He took a deep breath before he looked at Harry.

"I am sorry, Harry. God I am so sorry! I don't expect you to forgive me or even want me as a friend. But I need you to know I am sorry

and I know that everything was my fault and mine alone. I was a stupid, insecure, selfish git and I ruined everything I ever had."

Harry decided not to say anything, yet.

"After the War ended, I had money, fame, popularity and two of the best friends anyone could have hoped for. I had everything I thought I wanted in life. I let it all go to my head. I became worse than Percy ever was - worse than anyone I know.

"Hermione once said I had the emotional range of a teaspoon. She was being ever so generous in that assessment. I had no clue about how I really felt about anyone or anything. I foolishly thought...well.

"I should have never gone out with Hermione. Deep down, though I refused to admit it at the time, I knew that while we were good friends we would never work as a couple. I did not respect her that way and doubt that I ever would have. I never really listened to her, you know. I never apologized to her after a row. I never once truly thought she was right and I was wrong. I now know I loved her as a friend and that was it.

"I asked her to marry me without even thinking about it. Deep down, I knew. I knew I would break her heart one day and I knew if that happened I would not lose just her as a friend, I would lose you too. What I didn't know was how I would lose almost everything I ever had - all my friends, my family, my job, the life I envisioned. Everything.

"When I started seeing Lavender, deep down I knew I loved her. I probably had since before Sixth Year, but when we first started dating during Sixth Year I really wasn't ready for her - or any woman, really. I knew I was in trouble when we got back together shortly after Hermione went back to school. I knew I was engaged to the wrong person. But I could not - I could not do what I knew was right. I could not break up with her. I should have. I knew if I had done so, she would have been hurt. I believe you would have been hurt because she was. But things would probably have been so different.

"But I didn't do that, did I? I cheated on her, lied to her, lied to you. I got so messed up about it that I even began cheating on Lavender. I began drinking - heavily. Anything to kill the feeling of guilt. Except

all it did was make me feel worse, which meant drink more, chase more skirts. A vicious cycle which I did not know how to break.

"No, that's wrong. I did. Come clean. Apologize. Stop lying to myself and others. In the end I did and am doing just that. But back then?

"Then Hermione caught me with Lavender. I broke her heart. I broke Lavender's because I told her I had ended it with Hermione. Lavender told me months earlier that I had three choices: Hermione, Lavender or neither. But I loved Lav, and everyone expected me to marry Hermione and I thought...

"Well, I was an idiot and thought there was a fourth choice. I was SO wrong. I lost Hermione forever. I lost Lavender. I lost you as my friend. I tried to keep you guys, but you would not ... well. I knew deep down I had blown it. When you and Hermione made it clear that I was done being your friend, I then tried to get Lavender back. That's when she told me she was pregnant, Harry. She told me she would never be my girlfriend ever again. She told me she meant it when she said she loved me. But she was done waiting for me. She was going to have our child with or without me and she really didn't care if I was there or not. She made it clear. We get married or we were through, period!

"So I tried to get Hermione back. I thought Lav was trying to trap me. I brought my Mum with me that day. Course, I didn't tell Mum a thing about Lavender. Just that I messed things up with Hermione and she wouldn't listen to me. That went well. Hermione did not waste any time in telling Mum that the reason she dumped me was because she caught me cheating on her in no uncertain terms. Mum told me later - very loudly - that she was not going to help me out of the mess I had gotten myself into and that as far as she was concerned I was a total disgrace to my family.

"Because of my stupidity, in about one week I lost the woman I loved, my two best friends in the whole world, and most of my family. Only Ginny - only Ginny did not disown me, although later I learned it was only because I 'got rid of' Hermione.

"I was so desperate. I went back to Lavender, begged her forgiveness and asked her to marry me. At the time, I thought it was just for our child and that I was settling. I now know it was because I loved her and really wanted to, but I was such a mess back then that

I could not even feel that I had a heart. Lavender knew I was a wreck. She believed one day I would grow up and was willing to wait and to suffer until that day arrived. You have any idea? Any idea how special that makes her? At that time in my life I didn't deserve her. I didn't deserve anyone.

"God knows how many times my immature and insecure behaviors hurt her. I still drank too much. I ruined our wedding. I ruined yours. I missed the birth of our first child. I cheated on her and she knew that I was. My stupidity cost me my job. For a long time I blamed you for that. I believed you got me fired to get even for what I had done to Hermione. I now know it was entirely my own fault. You would have fired anyone under similar circumstances, but I was too stupid to see it.

"I took Ginny's side in your annulment. Well, everyone did at first. Everyone except my wife. We all thought Ginny was a victim or something. We thought that when you left her for that posting in the States. We thought that when you filed for annulment. We believed her rubbish that you must be having an affair. By the end of the hearing, I was the only one remaining in her corner. I have no excuse. No good one, anyway. She had been on my side before. I felt I owed her - the ungrateful bitch!"

"What happened?" Harry asked. It was the first time he had said anything since Ron had started talking.

"You remember that interview she gave Rita Skeeter about a year later concerning the heroes of Hogwarts."

Harry nodded. "Pack of lies," he added.

"Right. And what she said about Lavender was unforgivable! I can't think of anyone I know who Ginny hasn't stabbed in the back or slandered if it seemed to make her more important. Anyone! She's a real piece of work, Harry. Biggest mistake you ever made was marrying her and the best thing you ever did was un-marrying her."

Harry could not disagree with that assessment.

"She seems to think her fans are her friends and that they really like her and those of us who know her and see her for who she really is don't. You know all too well the opposite is the truth. People who like

you because you are famous don't like you at all. Took me a while to learn that bitter truth. But I had learned it by the time of the annulment. I grew up a lot. I just wish it didn't have to be so hard."

Harry nodded.

"You'd think getting fired from the Auror Corps might have been a wake up call for me," Ron went on. "It should have been. I knew why I was fired, but I did not tell Lav. Told her it was you getting revenge for Hermione. She did not believe me, of course.

"The only thing that changed was that I stopped cheating on her. At the time it was a question of logistics and not desire. I would not cheat on her on home turf. I know I told you when you chewed me out for hurting her that I thought what she didn't know would not hurt her and so long as my stupidity was overseas, she would not know. She knew. She knew about every one of them. She even knew about the one that cost me my job. I never told her and neither did you, even though you threatened to. But others talked. She never said a thing to me at the time. She kept it to herself until I was ready to grow up. She waited for me, Harry. Waited when no one else would have bothered." Ron was crying now.

"So I was faithful by geography if not by design. But I still drank too much. The only thing I did not do was get drunk around Gabrielle. It wasn't until a year later when I realized my whole world was crashing to the ground that I let everything change.

"Lav was pregnant with Molly. We knew. On day I came home from work and I found Lav lying on the floor in pain. I rushed her to St. Mungo's. She was three months into her pregnancy and almost had a miscarriage, Harry. I was devastated - well, she was too, but I was worse. I knew, in a way, it was my fault. Bad Karma they call it, I guess. I had been such a self-centered, heartless prick. Fate or God decided it was payback time. I quit drinking that day. Haven't had so much as a butterbeer since. But God was not done with me.

"About three months later, Lav almost had another miscarriage. The Healers told us she would have to be bedridden for the rest of her pregnancy. George, bless him, allowed me a leave of absence to be with her and take care of her. She was not that hard to care for, although changing bedpans is even worse than nappies."

"I love you too, dear," Lavender said with a laugh in her voice.

"Aside from the time taking care of her needs or little Gabrielle, there was not much to do really. So Lav and I talked. We talked about almost everything - except my infantile behavior - that would come later. I realized there was no one else I wanted to talk to - not like that and that I needed to talk to her. I thought about it. I had always envied the relationship you had with Hermione: how you knew each other better than anyone else, how you learned to know what the other felt or was thinking without having to ask. I wanted that. I finally found it with Lav during those months. I was ready to grow up, I guess.

"Then it happened. Lav went into labor and everything went wrong. It was horrible. Little Molly almost died. Lav, she lost so much blood she slipped into a coma. She then got an infection and nearly died herself. I never left her side (except to pee). She was in a coma for eight days. I didn't eat. I didn't sleep. I lived on water or juice. I lost a lot of weight. I held her hand and cried like I did not know was possible. I begged her to wake up. I begged to come back. I begged her not to leave me. It was I who woke up first.

"I saw what an arse I had been. I saw I had the perfect women all along. I saw I had the key to my own happiness and I saw that I had ignored her and ignored what I felt about her almost from the start. I would not have blamed her if she had died. I deserved that. For every time I had broken her heart over the years before, for every time I had hurt someone I loved through my stupidity, I was paid back with interest. I knew if she died, my life was meaningless. She couldn't die! Not now! Not when I finally realized how much I needed her, how much I loved her and how much she meant to me. I promised her that if she's only come back, I would spend the rest of my life begging her forgiveness and doing everything possible to make her and keep her happy. I promised I would justify her infinite patience in me and give her what she wanted from me. Told that to her day after day, hour after hour.

"I was about to give up. It seemed hopeless. The Healers told me it was only a matter of time. There would be no love in my life anymore and I had been too stupid to enjoy it when it was there. They say it is always darkest before the dawn. Believe me, they were being mild.

"In the moment of my deepest despair, she came back to me. It was a beautiful morning and the sun was shining on her angelic face and I was crying and pleading for her to come back. I began to tell her I loved her. I loved her more than anything and anyone and I would love her until the day I died. I barely noticed she had opened her eyes. Nearly died right then and there when she said she loved me too. God had brought her back to me, even though I was not deserving of His Grace. I wake up everyday now and watch her sleep for a bit. In the morning, like the morning when she came back to me, when she is asleep and at peace, she is at her most breathtaking. I never want to hurt her again.

"I know you might never forgive me for what happened and I know the past can never be revived. I just wanted you to know I am deeply sorry for all the pain I caused."

Harry nodded, afraid to speak.

"I also want to thank you, Harry."

"Thank me?"

"Yeah. Thank you for being my friend once. I may have been a git, I may have ruined it. But thank you. I also need to thank you for firing me."

"What?" Harry asked in surprise.

"Face it. I was a lousy Auror. And it was not because of my reckless personal life. We both know a couple of really good Auror's as messed up if not more so than I was. The only reason I stayed on more than a year is that the Auror Corps was all but wiped out during the War. I never learned the job and never liked it, but was too pig headed to quit. As much as I hated you then, it was the best thing anyone could have done for me at the time. I went to work for George and I have been happy with my job ever since. If it wasn't for the fact that I can't stand to be away from Lav and our children for a minute, I would actually never want to go home from work.

"I also want to thank you for being Lavender's friend even if you weren't mine. Those first couple of years when I was an ass, she needed a friend. Thank you."

"I'm still her friend," Harry said.

"Thanks for that as well, Harry," Ron said with sincerity.

"See," Lavender said to her husband, "was that so bad?"

"No. No, it was not bad at all, Love. You were right. You always are."

"Feel better?"

"Oddly enough, I do."

IN THE HOTEL LOBBY

Hermione had left Harry and hurried to the hotel lobby. There at the front desk stood her mother, sister and two children.

"Hi everyone," she said brightly.

"Mommy," her two children exclaimed! They ran to her as she knelt down to hug them both. She kissed both of them on the forehead.

"I've missed you two so much," she said.

"Mommy," Luna replied, "it's only been a day!"

"You didn't miss me," Hermione said with a fake pout.

"I did," Luna whispered back. "I always miss you when you're away."

"Harry?"

"Me too, Mom."

Hermione hugged them again.

"You look pretty, Mommy," Luna said as Hermione stood again.

"Thanks," Hermione replied, winking at her Mum. "Don't I get a hug too," she asked her younger sister Daphne.

"I suppose," Daphne said. Daphne sounded indifferent, but they both knew it was a way Daphne teased her older sister.

"Thanks. I missed you too, Sis."

"Why do you look so pretty, Mommy," Luna asked?

"I've got a special surprise for you," Hermione replied.

"Really?"

"What about me?" Harry asked.

"You too. It's for all of you."

"Can we see it now?"

"No. First, we have to go up to the room and get you all unpacked. Then we have to get you looking your best, and..."

"I always hate dress up surprises," Harry moped.

"I think you may like this one."

"Doubt it."

"Can you give us a hint, Sis?" Daphne asked.

"It's something you've heard a lot about, but have never seen."

"Thestrals?" Luna asked.

"I shall say no more," Hermione said. "And after the surprise, hamburgers or hot dogs or pizza, okay?"

"Yay," the three hungry children exclaimed.

"You could tell they hadn't eaten," her mother whispered as she led the group and the bellhop with their luggage to the elevators.

"There's a look on their faces when their dinner is late," Hermione said.

"You really are a great Mum, you know that don't you?"

"I learned from the Master."

Rose Granger laughed. "Who stole you away to teach you your tricks?"

"So, I improvise a bit."

"Don't we all."

GRANGER ROOM

Her mother had adjoining rooms with a view of Central Park, although it was dark out. Hermione's Room was a couple of floors higher in the hotel, but did not enjoy the view, which was why she had gone to breakfast in the Atrium that morning. Odd, she thought as she unpacked her children's luggage. My extraordinary day may not have happened at all if I had a room with a view.

"Mommy's not staying here?" Luna asked.

"No Love," Rose Granger said. "You Mum's here on business, not vacation. She needs a place to work. But she's here in the hotel and we'll have all day with her tomorrow and we'll have breakfast with her everyday and dinner and she'll read to you as always and tuck you in at night. It will almost be like being at home."

"Gran said we're going to a baseball game tomorrow, Mom," Harry added changing the subject.

"We are. Although it's not the Cardinals."

Harry pouted.

"It's the Yankees."

"Gross," Harry said. Harry Granger hated the Yankees.

"You can always root for the other team."

"Can I? Cool!"

"It's not the Royals, is it?" Daphne asked.

"The Nationals."

"Futile."

"Why do you say that?"

"They suck."

"DAPHNE," her mother exclaimed!

"Sorry Mum, but it's true."

"There's always hope," Hermione said for encouragement.

"It's a baseball game," Harry added with glee.

Daphne nodded. "Well, since it's not the Cardinals, I am rooting for the Yankees! Derek Jeter is cute!"

Hermione chuckled. "Okay, you three," she said. "Change clothes and get cleaned up."

"Why?" They complained.

"Because I said so," Hermione retorted. "You have not had dinner and that means a restaurant and I will not have the Granger name stand for plane rumpled ruffians!"

"Can I wear my Scott Rolen jersey?" Harry asked.

"Is it clean?"

"Mother," Luna exclaimed! "Do you think I'd let the jerk pack dirty clothes."

"I am not a jerk!"

"Yeah, but you would pack dirty clothes!"

"Quiet! If it's clean, Harry."

"Thanks, Mommy." Harry followed the two girls off into the adjoining bedroom.

"You really are a good mother, Janie," Rose Granger said.

"Thanks."

"And I know you didn't learn that from me. I could never get that from you without a discussion."

"Okay, so I stand on the shoulders of giants."

Rose laughed. "I guess. So he's really here," she whispered.

Hermione nodded.

"And?"

"I still love him."

"Oh?"

"And he still loves me."

"Oh."

"I'm scared, Mum."

"Why?"

"I don't know how this will work."

"You just answered your question, Love."

"How?"

"You said how, not if."

"I don't..."

"'How' can be worked out. 'If' is always harder. I know, he lives there, you here. Still..."

"He has an adopted son..."

"What?"

"Friends of ours before the War. They were a fair bit older than us. The father was Harry's Dad's best friend in school. The Mum was much younger and was finishing school when Harry and I began, although we don't remember her from school. They got married and had a son. He was born the same day as Daphne. A month later, his parents - our friends were killed."

Rose Granger gasped.

"Harry was Teddy's godfather. Harry was seventeen at the time."

"Too young to be a ..."

Hermione nodded. "There was a grandmother still alive and Teddy went to live with her. This was well before I left, so I knew this. Harry visited often. Several months after I found you and Daph, the grandmother died. Teddy went to live with Harry and Harry adopted him."

"Oh. He's told you about that?"

Hermione nodded.

"And?"

"And Harry sounds like a wonderful Dad."

"Something you've never said about any of your dates in the past."

"Most left after I said I have kids, Mum."

"And Harry?"

"I told him about them."

"And?"

"He cried."

"He did?"

Hermione nodded.

"If you lose him again, Janie..."

"I don't want to."

"Don't!"

"He lived here a couple of years, you know."

"H-he did? When?"

"2003 and 2004."

"Where?"

"Atlanta."

"Braves fan?"

"Unfortunately."

"Is he still married?"

"Annulment."

"Really? Oh, you mentioned that, didn't you?"

Hermione nodded.

"Sorry. Guess I had a senior moment. So what happened?"

"From what he told me, it was a terrible marriage."

"How? Who?"

"He petitioned. His wife hated his adopted son and did not want children."

"Oh."

"He never really had a family growing up. That was all he ever wanted and she did not want that."

"I understand, Love. Did he look for you when he was here?"

"Thought I was still in Australia."

"Why didn't he write to you?"

"After my first letter, he never got any of the others."

"He moved?"

"No."

"Then why...?"

"His girlfriend then wife binned them."

"She read them?"

"He doesn't think so. I gave him copies of my first several letters. He was certain she would have ripped his head off had she read them. She just chucked them without reading them or telling him. Mum?"

"Yes?"

"He did write to me."

"Really?"

"At least once a month. He saved all the letters hoping one day he could mail them."

"When did he stop?"

"He didn't."

"You'd better keep him."

"I want to, Mum."

"If you want to move back, I'll come too."

"Mum?"

"I won't lose you again, Janie. If that means England, I am ready."

Hermione hugged her mother. "I don't know what it means yet, Mum. But thanks!"

"What's going on?" Daphne's voice asked.

Hermione turned to her sister and smiled. "She's my Mother."

"But you're all grown up!"

"Sis, I am. I have kids of my own. But our Mom will always be our Mom and we will always be her little girls. Best get used to that."

"I guess."

The younger two then entered the room.

"All set?" Hermione asked.

They all nodded. The Granger clan then left the room.

THE ATRIUM

Hermione could not believe how she felt. She was excited. This morning when she saw Harry sitting at her table, she was terrified. She was sure he hated her for leaving. But, he did not. She was sure he would leave her the minute she mentioned children - his children, but he did not. He wanted to know them. Wanted to meet them. She just hoped seeing them so soon would not be too much, but something told her it would be perfect. She held her son a daughter's hands as they entered the Atrium and walked towards the table where she had left Harry. She saw he had waited as promised and felt like she was walking on air until...

He was not alone. A couple of steps closer and she recognized who was sitting with him. She stopped. She froze. Her heart started racing. This had been the perfect day, the perfect day of perfect surprises and now? Not them! Not Ron Weasley and Lavender. How could they ruin everything again! Her mind went blank and she did

not notice the small figure that continued to walk towards the table with a determined gait.

Their conversation, or rather Ron's confession had ended only moments ago. Ron was spent in a way and Lavender was looking at him and holding his hand. There was love and even pride in her eyes. Harry knew that she knew that had been so hard for Ron and that she was proud he had handled it so well. Most people had thought Lavender was a bit of a ditz in school. Harry had learned she had hidden her intelligence and her courage. He and Hermione had thought at one time or another she was a doormat. Far from it. Lavender was a formidable person under the right circumstances and, for what she had put up with from Ron waiting for him to grow up, Harry thought she should be a Saint - or a Martyr depending upon one's opinion of her husband.

The couple had focused on each other for now and Harry looked around and saw the little girl approaching. He recognized her immediately. It was the spitting image of Hermione, but only eight years old. It was Hermione's sister Daphne. Could that mean? He looked around for Hermione, but did not see her. He did not know it, but she had ducked behind a potted bush trying to collect herself. Harry locked eyes with the little girl.

"You must be Daphne," Harry said to the girl who seemed to be studying him.

"How - how did you know that?" She asked in reply.

"Your big sister has told me a lot about you," Harry said.

"Oh," Daphne sighed.

"She told me how smart you are and how proud she is of you and..."

"She said that?"

Harry nodded. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Ron and Lavender were watching.

"You look just like she did when she was a little girl, you know," Harry said. "Well, almost."

"Almost?"

"The mean people at school called her 'chipmunk.' Her front teeth were a little large."

"Really?"

Harry nodded. "Never noticed that myself until after she had them fixed."

"And what did Sissy say about me?"

"You're smart as a whip. And, I believe, a Cardinals fan?"

"Of course. Although, Mum, Gran and the kids and I are going to a Yankees game tomorrow. Harry and Luna are going to root for the Nationals."

"You're not?"

"Derek Jeter is a Yankee. He's cute. You know, you are the first grown up who did not think my sister was my mother?"

"She told me about you. She also said you hated that, Daphne."

"It's annoying. Honestly. But I do love Sissy. She can be like a second mother, you know, especially when I mess up. But she's also like a big sister, too. Best and worst of both, I guess."

Harry laughed. Before Harry could react, the eight year old had jumped into his arms and into a hug.

"I know a secret," she whispered.

"You do?"

"You're Harry and Luna's daddy, aren't you?"

"It seems so." Harry put Daphne down. "I only just learned that today, Daphne. How did you figure it out."

"Sissy gave us a riddle when we arrived. She said she had a big surprise for us and that it was something we've heard all about but had

never seen. Eyes and hair. There you go."

"You're really smart, Daphne," Harry said. He then whispered. "This is a secret. Sissy is really smart, you know."

Daphne nodded.

"You are at least as smart as she is."

"I am?"

Harry nodded.

"Thank you," Daphne said with a smile.

Harry noticed an older woman had approached. Hermione had shown Harry pictures of the kids on her laptop and Harry recognized her as Rose Granger, Hermione's mother.

"Looking for your daughter?" Harry asked as he put Daphne down and stood up.

"Daphne," Rose said, "what have I told you about running off in a strange place?"

"That I shouldn't."

"Right. So why did you?"

"Because I figured out what Sissy's surprise was."

"She did?" Rose asked Harry.

Harry nodded.

"It's still a secret, right?" Daphne asked. "I'm not supposed to tell Harry and Luna?"

"That's right. Sissy will tell them."

"They'll be so happy."

"I know Sissy hopes so. Harry?"

"Yes?"

"It's been years," Rose said extending her hand. "Last time I saw you, you were a good foot shorter at least."

"Really? I guess it has been a while, Mrs..."

"Rose, dear."

"Rose. I was sorry to hear about Robert."

"Thanks. So, Daphne giving you any trouble."

"Mother!"

"No," Harry said. "No trouble at all. She's at least as smart as her big Sis."

"Janie thinks so too, but she won't tell Daphne."

"Why not."

"Cause," Daphne said. "She doesn't like it when I brag."

"Really? She used to brag about her grades all the time."

"She did? Ooooh, she's so gonna get it!"

Harry and Rose laughed.

"So where is my other daughter?" Rose asked. "Oh, here she comes."

I can't believe it, Hermione thought having hidden behind a bush. Why are they here? Stupid! You knew Weasleys was showing. And that git works for them. But why Lavender? Where are her children?

Wait. If what Harry said and wrote was true, it's only Ron. Lavender - well you were wrong about her. Maybe it won't be so bad.

It won't be good.

You can't hide. Not now. Harry! He needs to meet them.

For Harry. With that, Hermione took her children by the hand and walked towards Harry and the others.

Hermione stopped just short of the table. She purposefully ignored the new couple. She did hear a voice start "Blimey, it is ... ooof!" "Shut it, Ronald," a woman's voice whispered harshly. Lavender is no doormat, Hermione thought as she turned and knelt to face her two children.

"Where's our surprise, Mommy?" Little Harry asked.

"Patience," she began to reply.

"Is a virtue," Luna finished.

"Okay," little Harry said with disappointment.

"Kids? You remember the 'Daddy Stories,' right?" Hermione spoke softly, but just loud enough that all the adults could hear. She was proud of her babies and did not care what the Git thought.

They nodded. They had not looked at the strangers nearby.

"Remember the one about when I came to Australia to find Gran?"

They nodded.

"What happened?"

"You found Gran and Daphne," little Harry said. "But Grandpa was gone."

Hermione nodded. "And?"

"You lost Daddy," Luna added. "You lost him and could not find him again."

"Right. Well, this morning at breakfast, your Daddy found me."

Two pairs of eyes opened wide with surprise.

"This is your Daddy," she said pointing to Harry. Harry was trying desperately not to cry.

"WHAT," a voice exclaimed. "Shut it," another shot back.

"Are you our Daddy," Luna asked.

Harry could not trust himself to speak. He just smiled and nodded at his two children as he knelt down before them. The two leapt into his arms and he hugged them close.

"We've missed you, Daddy," Luna said into his chest, "so much!"

Harry held his two children for what seemed like a long time and soon realized they were crying a little too. He loosened his hug so he could look at them. "Hey," he whispered, 'what's wrong.'

"Nothing," Luna said. "I'm just happy is all."

Harry looked at his son.

"What's wrong," he asked because it was clear something bothered little Harry.

"Y-you can't be our Daddy!"

"Dufus," Daphne shot out.

"Daphne," her mother scolded.

"But he is, Mommy! It's obvious this is his Daddy."

"Why?" Little Harry asked.

Daphne huffed. "Let's look at the facts. First, Sissy says he is. Why would she lie to you?"

"I don't know."

"Second he doesn't deny it."

"So?"

"Third, what does Sissy tell you to do every morning that you usually don't do?"

"Look in the mirror?"

"If you bothered to look in the mirror, you would see you look exactly like him, only smaller and dumber."

"I'm not dumb!"

"You act dumb!"

"Kids," Rose and Hermione said in unison and the Aunt and Nephew shut up.

"He's not our Daddy," little Harry said. "Mommy said our Daddy does not love us and never wanted to see us."

Hermione gasped!

"She told you that?" Harry asked appalled.

"N-no. But I remember. Long time ago, I couldn't sleep so I went to find Mommy. She was crying and Gran was with her and she said Daddy never wrote to her or nothing and that he didn't love her or us and that if he did, he would have at least wrote her or come to see us but he never did. And Gran said to forget about him and told Mommy to stop writing and getting sad all the time."

"You never told me that," Luna complained.

"Sorry. It hurt too much."

"That was three years ago," Hermione said in shock. "That was right about when I stopped mailing you, Harry."

"Harry, look at me," Harry said. "I am your Daddy."

There was disbelief on little Harry's face.

"Then why?" He began.

"You Mum wrote me all the time. She told me all about my two perfect children. But I never got one of her letters. If I had known about you before today, I would have written you. I would have bought you presents for Christmas and for your birthday. I would have visited. At the very, very least, I would have done that. But I never got her letters."

"Did you move?"

"No."

"Then why didn't you get her letters?"

"Because, back then where I lived there was a wicked witch who stole all the letters from your Mum and binned them."

"Binned them?"

"Threw them away," Hermione explained.

"Oh. You talk funny, you know that?"

"He's from England," Daphne said in exasperation, "they all talk funny over there!"

"We'd say the same about you lot," Ron piped in. For once, Lavender said nothing as the adults actually laughed.

"Why did the wicked witch steal Mommy's letters?"

"Because your Mommy was my best friend and she hated the fact that she was not."

"Ginny," Ron growled. "Remind me Love when we get home to go over to her flat and knock what remains of her real teeth out of her face!"

Everyone stared at Ron.

"Bludgers," he explained.

"Ron," Lavender began.

"No! Lav, I think I can say this without sticking my foot in my mouth." Ron turned to Hermione and made eye contact.

Hermione nodded cautiously.

"Oooh, I know Lav and I have loads of questions for you, but that can wait. Years ago I hurt you. I broke your heart. I know that. You once told me I had the emotional range of teaspoon. You were always far too generous a person.

"I am sorry. I am sorry for a lot of stupid things I did back then. I broke the heart of everyone who ever cared for me and hurt everyone else. I was a stupid, self-centered, jealous, immature, insecure, insensitive, unfaithful, drunken - feel free to throw in any other derogatory adjectives - git. King Git, I was. I made all the other gits look good, I did. For years I blamed everyone but the one guilty party for all the pain I caused and all the pain I felt. I blamed you, Harry, the love of my life Lavender, the Chuddley Cannons, Chicago Cubs, the Queen, you name it. It wasn't until that terrible time, when Lavender lay dying - I thought, as did everyone else - that I finally blamed the one person who created all that misery - ME! I promised her and God that if she came back, I would try and undo all the damage I had done. I have been trying. I really have. Talking to Harry earlier was hard as hell, and now I will have to do the same for you, and it will be at least as hard for me, given how I am the reason you left and never came back.

"But as stupid and uncaring as I was back then, as many hearts as I broke and for all the pain I caused, I never once hurt anyone on purpose or intentionally. There is no excuse for what I did, except that. I DID NOT MEAN TO HURT YOU, I JUST DID NOT KNOW HOW NOT TO!" Ron was now standing and pacing back and forth.

"Ginny, on the other hand. Ooooh, is she a piece of work. She has hurt at least as many people as I have, usually hurt them more, and almost always on purpose! She had no right to steal those letters. I don't care what she thought she was! She had no right to steal Harry's children from him by not letting him learn about them.

"I don't know what went on between you two back then. If it was after I broke your heart, it really is none of my business. I admit I am curious, but I have not earned the right for an answer and, if I spend the next fifty years making up with you two, I might still not earn that right. But bloody hell, no one has the right to do what she did! NO ONE!

"The only relationship I think I got right from the start was as a Dad. I cannot imagine what I would do if someone took my Gabbie, Molly, Rosie or Artie away from me. I think I'm a pretty good Dad. I know Harry is. All the kids love him and Teddy thinks the world of him, or so Lavender and everyone else I know say. For my sister to deny these darlings that chance - out of spite - that is truly unforgivable! Truly!"

Ron stopped, sat back down and meekly said "Sorry. Got on a bit of a roll."

Hermione did not know what to think, except that she did not expect that. She could not help but smile. She then looked at Lavender and the thought dawned on her that Ron had truly found someone. This was not the result of a spell. This was real. Ron was still Ron, but his rough edges were gone and his extremes had been dulled and Hermione knew that was Lavender's handiwork. She knew she could never have done that. Lavender was no doormat, nor the ditzy, gossipy girl Hermione had known, but someone quite extraordinary.

"So," Luna said, breaking the tension, "you really are our Daddy?"

"I really am."

"He's not yours," little Harry teased, "you're adopted!"

Luna began to tear up.

"Harry," Hermione said. "Why do you always do that! Why?"

"Because it's funny."

"Well, let's see how funny it is if you don't get to go to anymore baseball games!"

"I'm sorry."

"I gave birth to her, same as you! If she's adopted, then you are too! Got it?"

"Sorry."

"You ever do that again, you can forget about baseball."

"I won't," little Harry said meekly.

Harry was looking at Luna, who was clearly upset. "Why are you upset?" He asked her.

"I don't look like anyone," she whimpered. "I don't look like Mommy, but Daphne does. Everyone thinks she's Mommy's little girl. I don't look like you, but Harry does. I have blonde hair like Gran, but I have blue eyes. What am I supposed to think, Daddy?"

"Listen to me," Harry said. "I had a Mum too, you know."

"What's a Mum?"

"A mother."

"Oh."

"She had an older sister named Petunia."

"Like the flower?"

Harry nodded. "Petunia had your blonde hair and your blue eyes. The story is that every first born girl in that family line was blonde haired and blue eyed. You are the first born in your generation of the line - well one of them at least. You have a blonde haired, blue eyed cousin as well. It is tradition, for lack of a better word. You're being who you are proves you are my daughter, Luna."

"It does?"

"Yes."

Luna leapt into Harry's arms for another long hug.

"That was very sweet," Hermione whispered.

"It happens to be true," Harry said. "Although whether there is a scientific explanation for it is another matter altogether."

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"They haven't had dinner."

"I guess that explains some things. Okay," Harry said out loud. "You Mum says you haven't had dinner. Is that true?"

"Yes," the children said.

"And you, Daphne?"

"I'm hungry," she said.

"Rose?"

"Could use a bite."

"Well, you're in luck. There's a place here still open where we can get hamburgers or hot dogs or pizza."

"Pizza," the three children exclaimed!

"Right then."

"Harry?" Hermione asked, glancing over at Ron and Lavender.

Harry nodded. "Didn't know either."

"Unreal."

Harry nodded.

"Not what I expected when I woke up."

Harry nodded.

"Their doing it again," Ron whispered with a chuckle to his wife.

"What?" Lavender asked.

"They are speaking volumes to each other without saying much of anything, really. They were always that way. I always envied that."

"We kind of do that."

"With our eyes," Ron agreed. "You think?"

Lavender nodded. "So try and be nice."

"So long as they are finally happy, I can live with anything else."

"Me too."

"Scared?" Harry asked.

Hermione nodded.

"So was I. It wasn't that bad."

She raised her eyebrows.

"No, not yet. But maybe one day."

"Better than nothing. Better than before."

Harry nodded. He then kissed her gently on the lips. He pulled her into a hug and whispered in her ear. "Promise me you'll try and be nice to Lavender? She is my friend."

"Promise," Hermione said.

"You think," Lavender asked in a whisper after watching the kiss?

"For their sake, I hope so," Ron said. "They deserve to be happy for once."

"No caffeine or sugar for the kids," Hermione called as Harry walked away. "They'll be up all night otherwise!"

"Don't worry," Harry called back. "I've been the victim of that mistake before!"

A/N: Ginny? She had brown eyes in the books. Besides, even I am not that cruel.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

The place Harry led Rose, Daphne and his kids to was a late night Diner for all practical purposes. It was set just off the Atrium. He had eaten here the night before when he arrived from London. The hotel catered to the magical world, but in keeping with its American heritage, provided non-magical amenities. In addition to the televisions, radios and telephones all over the place, there were four places to eat. There was a coffee shop, modeled after the nation wide non-magical Starbucks. There was the restaurant he and Hermione dined in that evening. There was an even fancier French restaurant on the top floor with an outdoor dinning area overlooking Central Park that Harry was thinking about as a place to have a dinner with Hermione, and there was The American Diner, which was a traditional diner. It served simple, yet tasty and well prepared - hand prepared food in large portions.

In Britain, at least until recently, witches and wizards cooked mostly with magic. It was good food, but Harry always felt it lacked something. Harry grew up in a non-magical household. He was kind of a Cinderella, ward of his Aunt and Uncle and treated as a servant. He learned to cook at the age of five. He hated cooking for them, but learned to love cooking. Hand made meals - as the magically crippled called it - was a challenge and allowed for creativity. Magically prepared meals were always the same, flawless and uninspired and unaffected by lack of talent or ability. The American Diner was hand cooked, and from what Harry had tasted last night, wonderful.

During their walk to the Diner, his son pestered him with questions of all sorts. Harry noted that Rose, Daphne and his daughter were silent. He knew they were processing what had just happened and he knew that his son's easy questions would soon give way to the girls' hard ones. Might as well enjoy it while he could.

"Mommy told us all kinds of stories about you, Daddy," little Harry said. "Are they true?"

"I don't know," Harry replied. "What stories?"

"She said you played Quidditch?"

"I did."

"She said you first flew on a broom when you were eleven and made the team - the youngest player in a century the same day."

"True again."

"You like flying on a broom?"

"I do. It's the only form of magical transport I like, Harry."

"Mommy won't buy me a training broom - not until school requires it."

Harry laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"Your Mommy hates flying."

"She flies on airplanes all the time!"

"She hates magical flying. She always has."

"Oh. Mommy said you were a Seeker."

"True."

"And you once caught the snitch in your mouth?"

"My very first match," Harry replied. "I was reaching for it and fell and it just somehow flew the wrong way down my throat. I did not catch it that way on purpose, and I never want to hear that you tried to do that. It was not fun at all, okay?"

"Okay. Mommy says you saved her from a Troll."

"True."

"What happened?"

Harry sighed. "Another boy had said something mean about her and hurt her feelings real bad. She had gone off to cry. I did not know that at the time. I was at dinner and a teacher said a Troll was loose. Your Mommy's friends - that woman earlier - she and her friend had told me your Mommy was off crying because of the mean boy.

"Your Mommy did not know about the Troll, so I went to find her. I saw the Troll and watched it enter a bathroom and decided to lock it in. Problem was, I did not know that was the bathroom where your Mommy had gone to cry. She screamed, I heard it and went in to help. I wasn't alone. My other friend was with me, still... It was one big Troll."

"But you beat the Troll and saved her, right?"

"That's true." And I always will try and save her, he thought.

"Mommy says you once fought a dragon."

"It that what she said?"

"She said once there was this big contest and there were four people in it and you were the youngest by years and years. She said that a part of the contest, each of you had to take on a dragon and you won."

"That's true. Although, take on does not mean fight."

"It doesn't?"

"What we had to do was take something that the dragon was guarding, a treasure of sorts."

"Really?"

Harry nodded. "But, what made it worse is we each faced a mommy dragon who was guarding her eggs and the treasure was with the eggs."

"Why's that worse?"

"Mommy dragons with their eggs or babies are really, really mean and scary."

"Why?"

"Because they don't want anything or anyone to hurt their babies and because until the eggs hatch, they can't hunt for food so they're really, really hungry. Speaking of hungry," Harry and the rest had been sitting for a few minutes and he waved for a waiter. Since each of the children wanted something different on their pizza, he ordered a pizza for each of them with whatever they wanted. Rose orders a salad for herself and Harry another cup of coffee.

"So," little Harry continued, "the dragon might try and eat you?"

Harry nodded. "And, there were rules that made it really hard to get the treasure."

"Really?"

"Yep! You were not allowed to hurt the dragon at all. You also were not allowed to hurt any of the eggs. If you did, you got penalties against your score."

"Mommy says you used a broom to fly around and all of a sudden you dove right between the dragon's legs and won!"

"That's true."

"Were you scared?"

"Of course."

"Wow. Mommy also says you rode the dragon."

"Actually, it was another dragon a few years later, but yeah."

"Was it fun?"

"Kind of. Did Mommy tell you she rode the dragon too?"

"She did?" Everyone at the table asked.

Harry nodded. "She never said that," little Harry complained.

"You said these were 'Daddy Stories.' Why would she?"

"Oh. Was she scared?"

"Not of the dragon, but yes she was."

"Why?"

"She hates flying."

"But she always is flying in planes and stuff," little Harry protested!

"Okay, she hates magical flying. She hates brooms, and dragons and hippogriffs and thestrals - at least flying on them."

"She's flown on all of those?"

"Yes."

"Wow!"

"Daddy?" Luna asked after a brief pause. It seemed little Harry was done for now. "Are you married?"

"No, Luna. I was once, but not anymore."

"Why not?"

"My wife and I did not get along at all. So it ended."

"Did you have children?"

"We did not. Obviously I do - you two. But, I also have an adopted son named Teddy."

Luna frowned.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked. "Do you know what adopted is?"

She nodded. "It's when your real Mommy and Daddy don't want you so you go to someone else."

Harry looked at her. "I suppose that is true in some cases, but not with Teddy."

"It's not?"

"No. Teddy's Mum and Dad were a lot older than I was, but they were my friends and they loved Teddy very much."

"Then why?"

"Because, when Teddy was just a little baby, his Mum and Dad died."

"So you became his Daddy?"

"Not right away. I was only seventeen at the time. Bit young to be a Daddy. But I was named his Godfather. And, I knew what it would be like for him."

"You did?"

"Yes, because my Mummy and Daddy died when I was just a baby."

"My Daddy died when I was just a baby," Daphne added. "It makes me sad sometimes. I never got to know him. But Mum and Sissy did, so I know a lot about him. Are you ever sad about your parents?"

"Sometimes," Harry said. "And it was a long time before I met anyone who would tell me about them. That was hard and I knew Teddy would be sad too. When his parents died, his grandmother took care of him and I went to visit him as often as I could. Then, when he was about two years old, his Gran died as well. I took him home and adopted him."

"Is he sad?"

"Sometimes. But mostly not."

"What's he like?"

"He was born April 10th, 1998..."

"Just like me!"

Harry nodded. "He's a little taller than you, Daphne and he's also really smart like you."

"Is he magical?"

"Yes, very."

"What's he look like?"

Harry laughed. "You never know."

"What's that mean?"

"He's a metamorphous. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes. I read about it once. That's someone who can magically change the way they look, right?"

Harry nodded. "His favorite trick is his hair color. He's been able to change that practically from the day he was born. Not long after he came to live with me, he could change into anyone his age. He used to do that at the park across the street from my house in London so I wouldn't find him to put him down for his nap. It took him a while to learn that while he looked like one of the boys - or girls - he was playing with, his abilities could not change his clothes, so I always found him. Want to see a picture of him?"

They nodded. Harry handed them a picture.

"He looks like my brother," Luna exclaimed!

"That's him trying to look like me," Harry laughed. "Here's what he really looks like," he said handing them the other picture.

"He's cute," Daphne said.

"Most girls agree," Harry laughed.

"Wait a minute," little Harry said, "you said he can look like a girl?"

"The face and hair, yes. Although he has not done that in ages."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why look like a girl?"

"What's wrong with girls?" Luna asked.

"I donno, but..."

"Well," Harry said, "I guess he did that 'cause he figured he's be harder to find."

"Oh."

"You work like Mommy does?" little Harry asked.

"Indeed I do," Harry replied. "In fact that's why I am here. I'm here for almost the same reason she is."

"Really?"

Harry nodded.

"Mommy invents and sells things," Luna added. "Is that what you do, Daddy?"

"No. Your Mommy is here to sell things. I am here to buy things."

"So buying things is your job?"

"No. I'm kind of like a police officer."

"You are?" Little Harry said in awe.

Harry nodded.

"So you catch bad guys?"

Harry nodded.

"Are there bad guys here?"

"Might be, but I'm not here to catch bad guys. Your Mommy and people like her are selling things that might help us catch bad guys and I am here to see what they have. If we can use it, I will buy it."

"That doesn't sound like fun," little Harry moped.

"It's called work, not play."

"Makes sense."

"What is it you really do, Harry?" Rose asked.

"I'm a Chief Inspector and the Deputy Director, Major Crimes and Special Operations Department, Royal British National Magical Police. It used to be called the Auror's office or Dark Wizard catchers, but we reorganized. It's now like the Magical Section of the American F.B.I."

"Deputy Director?"

"Second in Command," Harry said.

"Bit young, you think?"

"The office was all but wiped out during the War. Most of those who survived have either been promoted or retired. I am actually the second most senior Agent in the office. There were a lot of us who joined the government right after the War about my age. We are sometimes called the 'Young Turks' and have promoted far faster than our predecessors."

They were briefly interrupted as the pizza and Rose's salad arrived. It was clear to Harry immediately that the children were hungry as they all began devouring their pizzas as if it were their last meal. Harry smiled. They seemed to be enjoying themselves.

"How's the pay?" Rose asked.

"What?"

"The pay? Deputy Director must pay well."

Harry recognized this as the Mother protecting her daughter kind of question. What Rose was really asking was can you take care of Hermione and your kids. Although Harry did not know it until after the War, he was wealthy - very wealthy. The Potters were 'old money' and each generation had been smart with it. Harry had made some 'small' investments before he even finished school that had added to the fortune and had managed his financial affairs with aplomb. In the eight years since the war had ended, he had practically doubled his family wealth - although most of his new money was being used to support the Potter Foundation, an educational trust set up by an ancestor centuries ago.

"Honestly, I really don't know."

"You don't know?" Rose asked. It was clear she did not like that answer.

"Nope," Harry replied. "The pay isn't that big a deal, really."

"How...."

"Last year, through investments and rental properties and the like that I own or inherited, I earned about nine million."

"Dollars?"

"Pounds. I've had better years, but I guess I can live with last year."

Harry smiled as Rose's mouth dropped.

"I generally try to live within my paycheck, but I do have a few minor luxuries."

"Such as?"

"Well, my Land Rover for one. Not cheap. But, if it's good enough for Her Majesty... There's my Aston Martin - I do love that little car. Course, it only seats two, so... Teddy thinks it's a blast! Teddy and I live in London, but I have a Manor House near Oxford. I only use it in the summer. Even then, only for a few weeks. I also have a villa in France, although I usually let it out. Minor stuff like that."

"Minor?"

"When I was a boy, I had next to nothing really. All my family's property was in trust and such. My guardians treated me like a servant. For years I hated them. But that changed. I did learn the value of hard work from them - albeit grudgingly - and learned to be frugal as well. So when I finally took over my family's estate, being comfortable was not something I thought much about, really. I appreciate the value of one pound, but cannot fathom fifty million or so. To me it's make believe - or it would be if I had not also taken over the Family Foundation. My family has been well off for almost a thousand years, I learned. For most of that time they have funded various charities, sometimes alone. Your daughter, Rose, she went to Hogwarts thanks to one of my family foundations."

"We paid for Hogwarts," Rose started.

"You paid what you could afford. When I learned of the educational foundation I admit I checked. The tuition prescribed by the Board of Governors for Hogwarts for a child such as Hermione - one of non-magical birth - was ten times what you paid. At that time there was an institutional prejudice against her. Not from the Headmaster or the faculty, but from those who truly ran the school. Money talks even for bigots."

"So, you paid for..."

"I had no clue about any of this at the time. Professor Dumbledore was the guardian of my estate and held a power of attorney over my family's financial affairs and my proxy as head of our foundations. I only learned about it after the War."

"And you continue to do this?"

"And more. I learned of all of this right about the time I became an Auror, barely a week after the War ended. The office was augmented by people from the American F.B.I., the Canadian Mounties, the Australian National Police. Many of them brought families and they all came from countries where magical education began at age five, not eleven and did not end at age seventeen or eighteen. I opened a school in London about a block from my house based upon the American System of Magical Primary Education. The first students started that fall. It was a lot of work, but..."

"We started with a Kindergarten and what they call here the first three grades. In addition to the foreign students, we found most all of the - well children like Hermione - in the greater London area and most of them attended as well. A handful of magical families started sending their children not long afterwards.

"When they came of Hogwarts age, they were already at least three years ahead of most students. We set up a pilot secondary school program at Hogwarts based again on the American System, but tailored to the British system. Our students took their O.W.L.s after their Fourth Year - the first class being a year ago - and embarrassed the entire British Magical Educational System. Our worst student was have been in the top five percent of all the others. They took their G.S.C.E.'s this spring. I got the results just before this trip. They are all well above the national average."

"What about college?" Rose asked.

"For now, the Foundation will pay to send those student to college who want to go. If they want a magical degree they will come to the States, most likely. Otherwise wherever they want. But by the time Teddy and Daphne reach that age, I am hoping to have a University open in Britain."

"Goodness! Why are you doing this?"

"In part because I can. Mostly because I see a long term benefit. My goal is to put someone like me on unemployment - as it were. I and those like me can't change the attitudes of our parent's generation all that much. We cannot even do that with our own. But the children? They are the future and if they are taught right, then what happened years ago might never happen again."

"You know Harry, Janie always told her father and me how she admired you. She admired you for your idealism and how you saw a world that could be. In my day people like you were called radicals and revolutionaries..."

"That has not changed..."

Rose nodded. "But most tilt at windmills or watch their dreams wither under the harsh light of reality, yet you?"

"Most lack the financial wherewithal to do something. That's not my problem."

"Harry why are you really doing this? You're placing your family's fortune at risk and..."

"Um ... Janie told you what we did during the War?"

"Most of it, I think."

"And you know about me and such?" Harry noticed that Daphne was all but staring at him.

Rose nodded.

"As you know, Janie went back to school after the War. I did not. I thought that the end of the War would change things. It did not. The same problems and prejudices existed. We rounded up the enemy, but they were but the symptom that gave rise to the illness. The underlying cause was the system itself.

"I never wanted to be a part of that War. Never. I was dragged in, along with all of my friends and just about everyone else, kicking and screaming. What child deserves that? I was seventeen when the War ended and had been fighting for almost six years. Is that a way to grow up?

"I killed the first time I can remember when I was eleven. No child should ever have to do that. Fortunately, I don't remember that all that well, but I know I did it. I, like many others, were soldiers in that War and ... well ... we could be remembered for that. That's not a legacy I desired at all.

"Janie went back to school. I went into the Auror's Office and soon realized that the system and society that made that damned War possible had not changed a bit. I, and many like me - the Young Turks - began meeting. We began talking. We decided to change everything to make sure something like that - something that sent you to Australia - would never happen again. In our numbers were people who had been on the other side and seen and hated what they had been asked to become.

"The Minister for Magic - a friend of mine - got wind of our ... um ... revolutionary zeal and asked us to make recommendations for reform. You ever study American History, Rose?"

"Yes."

"The Constitutional Convention?"

"Yes."

"That's what we became. Before the Charter we wrote was enacted, the government had not evolved much at all. The Ministry controlled the Wizengamot for the most part, which means the Minister was all but a dictator. The Wizengamot was both the legislature and the judiciary and one was born into it. You only got in if you were the heir from one of the original 600 wizarding Clans from the original Briton Council of Warlocks formed in the eight Century - even before Hogwarts was founded. Clan lines have died out over the centuries and other lines have been disenfranchised. My family is from one of the original Clans and I am the heir. Originally, my House would have had one vote. When I first appeared in Chambers, I held 107 votes plus 78 that were willed to me by my Godfather. It turned out, there were other Clan heirs in the Young Turks. Between us, we controlled a majority of all the votes. Enough to change everything - which we set upon doing.

"We wrote the Charter. It was based largely on the Constitution of the United States and the constitutional structure of Great Britain. It called for three separate but equal branches of government. The Minister would be elected based upon a majority of votes from the Legislature. The Legislature would be elected by the people over whom they governed. The judiciary would be appointed, provided they were qualified at law and approved by a majority of the Legislature. There was a Bill of Rights, written by a son of a former Death Eater that states that all humans - regardless of magical ability or heritage - are equal under the law.

"On December 26th, 2002, in special session, the Charter was sent to the Wizengamot for consideration. Since we Young Turks controlled a majority of the votes, debate was prevented. It passed and became the governing law of magical Britain in fifteen minutes. The Minister, confirmed for term as the transitional leader, then sent the lot of us off to America for two years. In part, he did this to keep

us out of the firestorm we had created. In part, he did this so that when we came back we had other ideas as to how to improve the country.

"It is that and the education. That's what I want to be remembered for in the end."

"Does Janie know this?" Rose asked.

"Bits. Unless she knows from other sources, only bits. Rose, I haven't seen or heard from her in years. We both wanted to - to see and hear from each other. Until this morning - while I believed she was safe, happy and alive - for all I really knew she was dead. She could probably have said the same thing about me. We've spent most of the day talking about other things - us mainly. She told me about these wonderful children and that's been my main thing since."

"She'll be so proud of you, Harry."

Harry nodded. "I did what I did in her memory, Rose. I did it for her and for everyone like her. I did it because it was the right thing to do with my life, my memories and my fortune. I'd say, in a way, I did it also for Daphne, Harry and Luna even though until today I did not know of them, as they and the children like them are the future I and the rest of us did it for."

"Daddy?" Luna asked.

"Yes, Dear?" Harry replied.

"Do - do you love Teddy?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Because he's my son."

"But he wasn't always that, right? You adopted him. How can you love him then?"

Ouch! Harry thought. She's a smart one! Just like Teddy. Smart means difficult questions.

"For many of the same reasons your Mum loves you and your Gran loves your Mum and Daphne. You need us grown ups and you make us feel happy by needing us in the strangest of ways - especially as babies.

"One day, I hope, you will truly understand. When a baby smiles at you and needs you, that is special. When all you want is to see that baby and to be sure he or she is happy, that is special. Long before I adopted Teddy, he was special to me. He always smiled when he saw me and I could not help but smile back. Even before his Gran died, I was his father. One day, and I remember it like yesterday as I am sure your Gran does about your Mommy and Daphne and your Mommy does about you and Harry, one day you said your first word. Fair bet, it was Mama - or something like that. For Teddy it was Harry. One day, you'll have that and it will melt your heart. You cannot not love that child. So yes, I do love him.

"But do you love me, Daddy?"

Harry saw that one coming. The answer was a resounding yes, but would she believe a yes?

"Your Mum first told me about you and Harry just after breakfast this morning. She showed me a picture of you two. Do you know what I did?

"No."

"I cried."

"Why?"

"Because I missed so much. I never knew my parents, and I miss them. I did not know about you, but when I learned, I missed you so much. I missed your first smile, your first laugh, your first tooth, your first words, your first steps. I wanted to have been there for all of those things. I missed holding you when you hurt or were sick or had a bad dream. I missed taking you to your first baseball game or seeing you first go to school. I missed all of that. You are my

daughter, Luna. I wished I had known. I really do. I wish I could have been your Daddy long before today."

Harry sighed.

"Your Mum chose to have you and Harry as her children. She wanted to tell me, but she could not. Would I have chosen to have you too? Yes! Most certainly. I chose to have Teddy become my son. I would have done that even if I had known about you and Harry. Does that mean I love him or would have loved him more than you? No. It does not. You are my daughter, Luna. Harry is my son. Teddy is my son. You are my children and I have always loved you, even before I knew you were mine. I love you and always will."

"Good answer," Rose whispered.

"Did you love Mommy?" Luna asked.

"Yes. I have loved her for a long, long time."

"Then why didn't you marry her? Why did you marry someone else?"

Harry sighed. Honesty always works, he thought.

"Your Mommy and I met when I was eleven years old. She was the first real friend I ever had in my life. I now know that I was in love with her certainly since I was twelve. But, twelve year old boys don't fall in love, so I thought it was just that she was my special friend. She was always there for me, always trying to keep me safe and happy and I was always there for her too. We had our differences, but always when we were trying to help each other. We were there for each other always. And always, I thought, what I felt for her was because I was a friend. If she was hurt, so was I. If she was sad, so was I. If she was happy, so was I. I thought that was being a friend.

"It was not until later, until your Mommy and I lost each other, that I really figured it all out. I had other friends, but not like your Mommy. I had a girlfriend - later a wife - but it was never like being with your Mommy. Deep down, I knew. I knew I loved her more than anything. But I was afraid of that. Terrified. Dragons, trolls, evil wizards trying to kill me were scary, but not nearly as scary as your Mommy could have been.

"What do you mean, Daddy?"

"What if she did not feel the same way about me? What if she only just liked me? I was afraid that she did not feel the same way about me as I did about her. I was far less worried about being eaten by a dragon than I was about her breaking my heart, for I now know your Mommy is the only one on earth who can do that and I'd rather be her friend than have had her break my heart."

"Do you still love her?"

"When I saw her this morning, for the first time since well before you were born, I knew that I did and I walked over to her table, said hello and told her so."

"Does she love you?"

"What do you think, Luna?"

"I think she does. You?"

Harry nodded.

"Are you going to marry her? I hope you do."

"We'll see. There are many things between now and then." Harry looked at Rose and she understood. It was more than just a "we'll see," it was an if at all possible. She smiled at Harry. You had better, she thought.

"Yuck," little Harry said, looking up from his mostly eaten pepperoni pizza. "Lovey dovey girly talk!"

"Perhaps," Harry replied. "But maybe one day, you'll think otherwise."

"Gross! Never!"

"Boys," Daphne exclaimed!

"Why - how - how can you talk about such stuff, Daddy," Harry asked in total confusion?

"My parents died, remember. I was only a baby. I was sent to live with relatives who did not love me. Your Mum was the first who did. Before your Mum became my friend, I did not know what love was at all in any form. Your Mum and Gran love you and always have. I was a lot older than you before anyone did the same for me. So yeah, it's yucky. But it's not as yucky if you never had it before, Harry."

"I guess."

"And someday, if it is the right girl, it'll stop being yucky."

"As if!"

"Fine. Teddy is the same way - for now."

"Lovey-dovey is yucky," little Harry insisted. "And I want to know about Harry Potter."

"Harry Potter," Harry asked?

"Yeah, Mommy says she knew him once upon a time."

Harry heard a gasp and looked and saw Daphne had placed a hand over her mouth as if she had just said a bad word or something. The expression on her face reminded Harry of a much younger Hermione when she had just figured out something that had been vexing her for ages. Daphne had figured out who he really was, just as she had figured out that he was Luna and Harry's father. He smiled at her and winked and saw Daphne smile back through her eyes as she refused to move her hand. The expression was priceless, Harry thought. Daphne was in on the joke, as it were.

"I guess you could say that," Harry said. He heard a squeak from Daphne.

"So did you?"

"Did I what?" Harry asked back.

"Did you know Harry Potter?"

"We were in school together, so yeah. I guess you could say that."

"Was he as cool as he sounds?"

Harry thought about this for a moment. Part of him wanted to see if he could get Daphne to blurt it out. Part of him, though, wanted to make sure his son knew that being Harry Potter was anything but cool. How to do both. He thought about it. What bitter irony, he thought. Tell them about Harry Potter from another point of view, he thought. That of someone who was never amazed by his fame - and later became a friend because he saw Harry for Harry. Given them his friend Draco!

"Scarhead? Some did," Harry said with mock disdain.

"Scarhead?"

"That's what I called him," Harry replied. He again winked at Daphne to let her know he was teasing little Harry.

"You didn't think he was cool?"

"What's cool about being nutter bait? Dark wizards trying to kill you from the day you were born? Nothing cool about that. I wanted nothing to do with that nonsense."

"But - but he was so brave."

"You would be too, if a third of all the world wanted you dead and you didn't want to die. Nothing fun about that."

"But he's famous! That's got to be cool!"

"Does it? Look, Harry! I don't claim to be Potty's best Mate or nothing, but I do know him. He hated and hates being famous!"

"Why?"

"Do you want to be famous?"

"Yeah!"

"You have no idea then. Potty knows. Being famous sucks!"

"But everybody knows you..."

"Few if anyone does. Scarhead knows! He was famous his whole life. He never liked it. He could never truly tell if someone was really a friend - well, there was an exception - his only real friend was Hermione. But everyone else? He never knew. His worst enemy at school - Draco Malfoy was one of two people who saw him as he really was and not for his fame. Draco hated him because Potty was famous. Draco respected him because he knew Potty hated being famous. Hermione loved him because he was a decent person, but she hated his fame. The others?"

"You don't like Harry Potter, Daddy?"

"Not the famous one, no. Never have. The Harry Potter I liked you might never have read about. That Potter would have been happy if no one knew his name, except his friends."

"Why? What's wrong with being famous?"

"For Harry Potter, two things. The first applies to anyone who is famous. Say I was famous, okay?"

He heard squeaks from Daphne and Rose, but it seemed Harry and Luna did not notice.

"I would ask you, do you like me?"

"Yeah!"

"Harry. Be honest. I am not famous, am I?"

"No. Not that I know of."

"Do you like me?"

"Yeah! You're cool, Daddy."

"Luna?"

"I do. You're a good person."

"Thank you. I try to be. But if I was famous, I might not believe you."

"Why Daddy?" Luna asked.

"Because lot's of people want you to think their your friend if you are famous. Lot's of people say they like you when in truth all they like is that you are famous and they can say they know you.

"Do you want a friend who likes you because of who you are as a person? Or a person who says they are your friend because of what you are - a famous person?"

"I'd want a friend," little Harry said. "Not someone like that."

"So did Potty. He had a few, but not many. He had an enemy at school too - Draco Malfoy. Draco hated Potty because he was famous, but he respected Harry Potter for hating to be famous. Later in life, they became friends - not best of friends, but friends. Many others have claim Harry Potter as a friend, but all they wanted was to be part of his fame and not part of his life. He hates that.

"Still, he did amazing things," Harry protested!

"Not by his own choice. Things were forced upon him. Let's say it was you. You are playing tee-ball and the coach tells you you now have to take your bat and kill six dragons or else everyone you know will die. Would you be happy about that?"

"N-no." little Harry answered. "Is that what happened?"

"Something like that - but not that. Potter had to kill the most powerful wizard in the world, the wizard that killed his parents when he was just a baby, the wizard that made him famous before he could even talk. Everyone knew that - he knew that and he hated it. He hated being famous and he hated why.

"You see? Potter was famous not for killing that wizard - which he did and which he hates being famous for - he was famous when he was a baby and he hated why. That evil wizard killed his parents. It made him an orphan. And, what's worse, they died to save him because that evil wizard did not want to kill his parents, he came to kill the baby Harry Potter. That evil wizard killed Potty's parents and then tried to kill Potty. Somehow, and no one really knows how or why, Potty stopped him. Potty was just a baby and he beat the most

terrifying wizard in the world without knowing a speck of magic. He was famous all his life, almost. But not for a good reason.

"There's nothing fun about being famous. Throw on it being famous for killing, it's worse. And being famous for something that happened when you were a baby - worse again. Harry Potter has done some things since the war that he should be famous for. But no one sees past his fame for death and destruction. Harry would love it if he had never been famous.

"He married, you know. He thought she loved him. She only loved what he was, not who he was. What he was was famous. Only Hermione, his great friend - and Malfoy, his worst enemy in school - really knew who he was. He lost Hermione. He became friends with Draco. To this day, Harry Potter would rather be unknown rather than famous. If he had kids, Harry Potter would tell them to do great things, but to do their best at never becoming famous like he was."

"You don't like Harry Potter, Daddy?" Little Harry asked.

"Not the famous one and neither does your Mum."

"Oh," little Harry replied disappointed.

"We do like the real Harry Potter, though. The one who is not and does not wish to be famous."

"What happened to Hermione?" Luna asked.

"No one really knows, not even her best friend Harry Potter. A lot of people like Hermione left Britain during and after the War and has never come back."

"Like Mommy?"

Harry nodded. "Hermione was a witch from a family without a magical heritage," Harry said. "The war was hard on everyone, but particularly hard on people like Hermione."

"And Mommy," Luna added.

"And your Mommy, I suppose. Most of us who lived found we pretty much had to start over and rebuild our lives. I guess for many, like

Hermione, that was too hard. It would be easier to do it somewhere else, like here in America, far from the memories and reminders of that War."

"Mommy came here because Gran did," Luna said.

Harry nodded.

"And because she could go to college here."

"Everybody who left had their reasons, Luna."

"Did Hermione leave right away?"

"No. She missed her last year of school because of the War. So she went back and finished school. We think she left right after she finished."

"What do you think happened to her, Daddy?"

"Well, first of all, I don't think she left because of the War. Not really. If that was the reason, she probably would have finished school somewhere else. No. I think she left because of a broken heart."

"You do?"

"Yes. While she was in school after the War, the whole magical world learned that Harry Potter was getting married to another girl. Deep down, I like to think that Hermione really loved Harry and really hoped she might one day marry her best friend. When she learned that was not to be the case, I think she thought there was nothing left for her in Britain."

"That's sad, Daddy."

Harry nodded. "It is a sad story. But I always like to think even a sad story will one day have a happy ending. I like to think Hermione found what she was looking for, that she has a family she loves and a nice home where she can live out her life in peace."

"Do we have to talk about love again," little Harry said. "It's icky!"

"It is not," Luna said!

"Boys Harry's age think it is," Harry said. "But Harry, you are outnumbered here and girls do like those kinds of stories."

"What happened to Harry Potter, Daddy?" Little Harry asked.

"After the War, he became a dark wizard catcher. He works in my office in London."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Is that why you call him Scarhead?"

"It's his code name, although he does not like it much. He got it when he was at school and it stuck. His nickname is Sparks, which only his really good friends can use."

"Oh. What's your name, Daddy?"

Harry heard Rose and Daphne suppress a giggle.

"Dufus," Daphne finally said.

"What," little Harry complained?

"Who were you named after?"

"Oh yeah. I was named after Daddy so he's Harry too, right?"

"That's right," Harry said.

"Is your middle name Robert? Mine is. It was Grandpa's name."

"No. My middle name is James after my Daddy."

"Oh. Are you a Granger too?"

"No."

"What's your last name?"

Harry smiled. "Potter."

Daphne burst out laughing. Little Harry and Luna stared at Harry in surprise.

"You're Harry Potter?" Luna asked in amazement!

"I am," Harry replied.

"The Harry Potter? The Harry Potter we read about in books?"

"I wouldn't believe everything you read in books, Luna. But yes. I am in a lot of books."

"And Mommy was your best friend in the whole wide world?"

"Yes, she most certainly was - and is for that matter."

"But that means that Mommy is..."

"Hermione," little Harry finished in shock!

"She is," Harry replied. Little Harry then jumped from his seat and ran off in the direction of his mother. Harry could not help but chuckle.

"I am impressed, Harry," Rose said.

"Really? About what?"

"It took you well over an hour and a half to get to that point and you've been talking the whole time."

"Still, it would have been fun if I could have avoided it a little longer," Harry chuckled.

"Well," Daphne said, "I knew much earlier."

"I know you did, Daphne," Harry replied with a wink. "Sissy told me you were really smart."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SATURDAY - JUNE 17, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Hermione watched as Harry left her with her two children, Mum and Sis. He looked so comfortable with them she thought as a smile crept onto her face. She could see - and hear - that Little Harry had started pestering his Daddy with questions. Hermione sighed.

"He has no idea what he's in for," Hermione laughed.

"What," Lavender said.

"Harry. My little Harry is going to talk the poor man's ears off," Hermione finished as she took a seat facing Ron and Lavender. She smiled briefly at Lavender just before Ron began to talk. Ron told Hermione most of what he told Harry. He lay out in detail practically every dumb thing he had done since the War had ended. He made no excuses for his behavior and appeared sincere and contrite. Hermione was saddened and touched by the story of Lavender's second pregnancy and how that brought Ron back to reality. There can be redemption after all, Hermione thought.

"I don't expect you to forgive me," Ron began to conclude. "I really did not expect you to listen. I know I was a big reason why you left and never came back. I understand that. But can I ask one small favor from you?"

"What's that, Ronald?"

"Please see if you can find it in your heart to forgive Lavender?"

"I already have."

"You have?" they both said.

Hermione nodded. "I'll be honest with both of you. Until today I hated you both and never wanted to see or hear of you ever again. If I had seen you this morning before I met Harry - well I know we would not be talking. But Harry found me first.

"I honestly did not know what to expect when I realized Harry had sat down at the table with me. I certainly did not expect what

happened. Ron? I know you blame yourself for my leaving. I admit it was a part of why I did not choose to return. But it was only a small part. The biggest reason I never came back is because by the time I boarded my flight to Australia, I knew I was in love with Harry. I still am, it seems. I was in love with him - probably for years and maybe since the day we first became friends. I just refused to admit it to myself. It wasn't until the night following that lovely meeting with you and your Mother that I realized what I should have so long ago. I must have spent hours crying in Harry's arms following that. Finally, when I was all cried out, he kissed me and I knew.

"I did not come back because although I was sure he loved me too, he did not give me the reason to come back. I would not come back if all I had to come back to was being Harry's friend. Maybe I should have told him that before I left. But I didn't. At that time in my life, I thought that if a boy really loved you, you would not have to pry those words out of him. I now know I was probably wrong about that.

"Anyway, today got pretty emotional - in a good way. I told Harry about our children and showed him pictures. We then agreed we needed a little time. We both had to call home and check in and such. I had copies of every letter I ever wrote to Harry. I always kept them with me - although I can't really say why except they remind me I once had a perfect friend and there was a time - however brief - when I was truly happy. Harry wrote to me as well, hoping he would find me one day and be able to deliver his letters. We exchanged our first year's worth and spent time in our rooms reading them.

"Harry's letters - well it was obvious almost from the first that he felt sorry for you, Lavender. Mainly because of King Git, here. He could not understand Ron at all. Later, it seemed that he had become your friend and I knew that spoke highly of you because Harry is very careful about choosing his friends. This afternoon I asked about you and he told me. I roomed with you for six years, but the Lavender he told me about was not the one I remembered. That Lavender - and the one Ron described - is smart, determined, patient and very brave. That Lavender would never hurt me on purpose. I realized that everything that happened regarding you and Ron was Ron's fault and not yours and had Ron listened to you - like he should have - what happened would not have come to pass and maybe things would be different. I do forgive you, Lavender."

"Thanks. And those two darling are his children?" Lavender asked.

"They are."

"How'd that happened?" Ron asked.

"Ronald," Lavender began!

"Ronald," Hermione continued, "if what Harry's told me is true, you are the father of four children and your expecting a fifth, right." Ron nodded and Lavender beamed. "Surly you know where babies come from! Something like that happened to you - or am I mistaken."

"That was my fault," Lavender said. "One night I honestly forgot to take my birth control. What happened was an accident. But our Gabby is not a mistake."

"She certainly is not," Ron added.

"Something like that," Hermione said. "My romance with Harry lasted barely three days. But I was taking birth control. I asked the Doctor in Australia about that when she told me I was pregnant and she said it does not always work. Harry and I agreed back then that our brief romance was a mistake. That's what we told each other before I left. Neither of us really believed that though and those two angels are anything but a mistake."

"What's this Sissy and Janie business?" Ron asked after a pause.

"Well, Daphne is my little sister. She was a little over a year old when I finally found my Mum and her. Her first words came some months before I arrived. Her first was Mama. Days after I found them she said 'Sissy' - meaning me. She's called me that ever since. I think it's adorable, but then again so is she. As for Janie - Jane is my middle name. I wanted to keep a low profile so I would not be pestered with questions, so I have been Janie Granger since the morning I stepped off the plane from London. The only person who knows I am Hermione is my Mum. Honestly, I like being Janie Granger!"

"Must have been hard, being a single Mum," Ron said.

"I'm sure Lavender will agree that being any kind of a Mum is hard, Ronald." Lavender nodded. "Much less a mother of twins. But it's not

like I was all alone. I had loads of help from Mum and from our friends where we live. Had I been all alone - that would have been hard."

"My mother freaked when I told her about being pregnant," Lavender began.

Hermione nodded. "Imagine my shock! It had taken me almost two months to find out where my parents were. I was in Sydney the whole time living with another single witch named Amanda - she was attending university there. I thought it was stress when I started getting sick every morning. A couple of days after that started, Amanda convinced me to see a Doctor and that day I made an appointment by computer. It was with that computer I found my parents. They were in Shoalwater, Western Australia - about as far from Sydney as one could get. That was a Saturday. I would have left then and there, but I promised Amanda. On Monday, I went to the Doctor and she ran some tests. I then made an appointment to have my teeth checked at my parents' dental practice in Shoalwater the following Monday. A couple of days before my flight to Perth, I went back to the Doctor and she told me I was definitely pregnant.

"I had so been looking forward to seeing my folks again. Now I was dreading it. I knew I was going to get it. Still, it had to be done and I was going to keep the child (didn't learn it was twins until later). So off to Western Australia I went.

"That first day was shock after shock. First, I learned my Daddy had died and on the way to where my Mum lived, she let me visit his grave. Then, we get home and I learn I have a little sister. Maybe it was because I was pregnant - I fainted dead away when I was told that! Then Mum tells me she and Daphne are moving to the States in only a couple of days or so.

"I never got around to telling her that day. I told her a day or two later. I was amazed at her, really. She was so supportive - provided I carried through with my promises to move with her to the States and to try and go to University. I had plenty of money - so that was not an issue. While I was pregnant, she taught me everything she knew about raising a baby and I also learned loads by helping her take care of Daphne.

"I started school only days after we arrived. It was eight hours a day, six days a week. The school was for witches and wizards who had not been educated in the States or Australia. In those countries, you take magic on top of the same courses you would take had you never been a witch or wizard, so we had to make up for seven years of schooling before we could even think of college or even a decent job."

"All this while you were pregnant?" Lavender asked.

Hermione nodded. "My water broke during a history lecture," she laughed.

"I thought I had it rough," Lavender commented.

"Anyway, my class and professors agreed that since I was due right around the time we would take a week off for Spring Break, that our first day of Spring Break would begin the day I went into labor. So, a classmate of mine drove me to the hospital and all my classmates followed. My Mum came and they were all there when little Harry and Luna entered this world on March 22, 2000."

"Much better than my first," Lavender said. "I was all alone," she glared at Ron.

"Sorry," he said meekly.

"Anyway, in May we took our college boards, graduated and got our High School Equivalencies and I was accepted into St. Louis University beginning in the fall which gave me two months to mother my darlings to death before I'd have to hit the books again."

"Is that where you live?" Ron asked.

"Oh - sorry. My Mum and I moved to St. Louis. Actually, at first we lived in Clayton and now in Chesterfield, but it's the St. Louis area, yes."

"Ronald," Lavender scolded?

"What?"

"I can tell by that look in your eyes, Ronald!"

"What?"

"You were going to start talking about baseball and your Chicago Cubs, weren't you?"

"I - well..."

"I swear!" Lavender turned to Hermione. "He's much better about some things, but his conversational topics are SO limited: me, our kids, his work, Quidditch - as in the Chudley Cannons - and the Chicago Cubs, and not necessarily in that order! So you went to university?"

Hermione nodded. "I studied Applied Magical Theory and Business Administration. My Mum suggested I broaden beyond purely magical studies and it paid off in the end. I was hired as a researcher at Pak Riley Company in St. Louis. They specialize in combining magic and technology and I focused on magical laboratory equipment for forensic analysis and such. My department supplies most of the major magical forensic and pathology labs in the country - including the Magical Section of the F.B.I. More recently, I've taken on an additional role as a special projects sales representative. That's why I'm here. We're trying to crack into the European market which I hope shouldn't be too hard as we don't think we have any competition for our equipment over there."

"Good," Ron said.

"What?"

"Well, we're not really competitors then. Weasley Industries sent me to try and get into the American market."

"Weasley Industries?"

"My Ronald here has become quite the tycoon, Hermione. Best thing that ever happened to him was when Harry fired him from the Auror Corps. Isn't that right dear?"

"Indeed it is," Ron agreed.

"You see, Hermione, when Ron got fired his brother George hired him to work at Weasley Wizard Wheezes. Entry level, hourly wage, mind you, but it was a job. Ron spent six months learning everything he could about the business - serving customers, the mail order side, suppliers, inventory management, bookkeeping..."

"You were a huge help there, Honey," Ron added.

Lavender blushed at finished, "contracting, finances and investment and all of that."

"Don't forget product development," Ron added. "It was basically a crash course into how to run a business, Hermione."

"Anyway," Lavender continued. "Ronny wasn't but a few months into the job when he began thinking. He told me! Oh, until then I wondered about him and us! But he told me his ideas and I told him he was brilliant - he was - and he set to work. We set up our spare bedroom as an office and he began working at home a nights and, every once in a while he would call me in and we'd talk and he'd ask my opinion. And sometimes, he would actually listen to me! I was pregnant with Molly then. It was after my first near miscarriage.

"So he worked and worked. He was getting prepared to present his idea to George for advice and backing when I had my second near miscarriage. I was on bed rest and George - bless him - gave Ronnie time off to be with me. He moved his 'office' into my bedroom so he could work and be with me and ask me stuff.

"Two weeks before our Molly was born..."

"Before I nearly lost you, Love," Ron added.

"Ronnie went to his brother with his business plan."

"George thought it had potential, but it was outside his areas of interest. He was one of my first investors and he and Bill made sure Gringotts got in as well. Lav here went over the books and finances - she really has a knack for that sort of thing and I was certain I could make a go of it, then ... then I almost lost her. My business - I did it for her and Gabbie and Molly. If I lost her...I don't know. I told you earlier I had finally realized what I had in my Lav and having finally realized that I could not lose her, not now."

"And you didn't," Lavender said softly.

"I almost did!"

"I think - I believe you brought me back. I know I've told you that, still..."

"Still."

"Our miracle Molly was born November 4th, 2000. She was small, but she was healthy by the time I woke up the morning of the 12th. I was in hospital for another month and Ron was there most all the time. Company meetings were in my room - held in a whisper if Ron thought I was asleep. When I woke up, if I asked, I joined the meeting going over finances and such. As often as not, though, I was alone with my Ronnie and he'd rub my feet and back and tell me what he was thinking and ask my advice about things. It was even better than our honeymoon."

"Except no boom-boom," Ron said.

"Only 'cause the Healers..."

"The bastards!"

"I happen to agree, but we had to think of Molly."

"I know!"

"Anyway, despite everything, Ron's shop opened on time and under budget. Piccadilly's opened on January 1st, 2001 as scheduled. It was a huge success."

"Piccadilly's?" Hermione asked. "The Piccadilly's? The first true magical department store? That was you, Ronald?"

"It was," Lavender said. "He brought in the idea following a trip to Harrods. Wanted something like that for us magical folk - although most of what is sold you could buy in any non-magical shopping center. Of course, Harrods is more upscale across the board - but if you include mail order, well you can buy it through Piccadilly's!"

"We have a Piccadilly's in St. Louis," Hermione said. "It opened just after Thanksgiving 2004! I shop there all the time!"

"And I thank you and all of our loyal customers for helping put food on my table." Ron said with a laugh. "Within a year, I had no choice but to expand. The original Piccadilly's in Diagon Alley was so crowded - the Alley was so crowded I learned that it seemed people were coming to London from all over Europe to shop - and our shelves were empty far more than is good for business! I got investors from all over. In the five and a half years since I opened the first store, I've open fifty more throughout Europe and the United States. We also have one in Vancouver, Canada and another we just opened in Sydney, Australia and another in Melbourne. I spend a lot of time here in the States, mostly in Chicago where our U.S. headquarters is located. It was in Chicago where I was introduced to baseball. Been hooked ever since and Lav - our numbers cruncher - she really loves the game."

"It's subject to so much relevant statistical analysis," Lavender said. "I've learned to keep a score card and such. I never was into Quidditch nearly as much."

"So I take it you've been to a game," Hermione asked?

"Several. Ron's trips are never more than a few days and he takes me somewhere at least six times a year - sometimes more. The kids stay with the grandparents for a few days. Meanwhile, I get to see the world - or at least the Piccadilly's world: Paris, Madrid, Rome, Milan, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Athens, Vienna, Munich, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Chicago - lots of trips to Chicago - San Francisco, Seattle, Miami, Boston. This is my first time to New York, though."

"Don't forget our occasional side trips, Darling," Ron said. "You loved Florence and Venice."

"One long honeymoon, Hermione. I swear, every child we've conceived since Molly was in a romantic hotel room overseas. If I wasn't already expecting, we would be after this trip!"

"Ron makes it a point to bring me with him to Chicago at least two to three times a year - that's where his American corporate headquarters is located. We go at least once during baseball season

so we can take in a few games and once before Christmas. It's a lovely city, Hermione."

Ron laughed. "What she loves is the Million Dollar Mile - the shopping on Michigan Avenue!"

"And everyone loves their Christmas presents, don't they Love?"

"Only because you have good taste."

"I should hate the two of you," Hermione said. "But I can't. You are happy?"

"As happy as I've ever been," Ron said.

"If it took Infantile Ron to bring us here, then it was worth every tear, Hermione."

"Infantile Ron?"

"The one who broke your heart, broke mine time and again, drank 'til he passed out and cheated on me left and right. The one I waited for to grow up."

"You have grown as well, Lav. Maybe - maybe one day, we could be real friends."

"Thanks, Hermione. Harry is - but give me a break. He's a dear - but he's still a guy and there are some things a gal can't talk to a guy about."

Hermione nodded in agreement.

"So who's looking after your kids for this one," Hermione asked?

"This one is different. Before, when Ron took me away, the kids stayed with my parents or his. Not this time. We always planned to one day bring them with us so they could experience at least some of what I had. This trip - our oldest two are certainly old enough to remember it years from now. The kids are upstairs with my Mum - who came along to help out and because she's never left England before. Hopefully, the motley crew is asleep! Ron's here as a favor to George. Ron's really good at drumming up business and George

is hoping to expand his defense magic line overseas. I know Ron will do well and I am here to help with any financials. Mostly though, while Ron's stuck here wheeling and dealing, Mum and I are planning to take the kids to see the sights. We're taking them to their first real baseball game tomorrow. Yankees - I admit. But the week after this, we'll be in Chicago and Ron's got us tickets to the Cubs. Week after that, it's Disney World!"

"Ever been there?"

"No," both said.

"Took mine the last two summers. They love it!"

"So what about you and Harry," Lavender asked? "I take it you've been planning this for a bit? A chance for him to meet your lovely children finally?"

Hermione shook her head. "This day will go down as without a doubt the weirdest day in my life. Wonderful, but weird. Makes finding out I was a witch pale in comparison!

"I came here strictly on business. That's it. Business trips are a part of my job, but this one sucked. I was - I am to be here a week or more. I've never been away from my babies for more than three days since they were born, even then it was so hard.

"I came in around noon yesterday to make sure everything was in order and such. I already missed my babies. I always do - but I've never been away this long. Not for a whole week or more! I did wish they could come, honestly. But that was not the plan.

"I certainly did not know about Harry. Until breakfast this morning when he sat at my table while I was reading the paper, I had not seen or heard from him since 10:45 A.M. London time, on July 10th, 1999. Harry brought me to Heathrow for my flight to Sydney. He was flying to Rome on business. We both were flying British Airways and his flight was a few gates down from mine and about two hours later. I was flying First Class - why not? I could afford it at the time. So, I could board - whenever. I was practically the last on. Until this morning, I never heard from him again.

"My kids were not supposed to be here. That was my Mum's idea - her surprise. She knew I had never spent more than three days away from them since they were born. She knew I'd go spare without them for so long. She decided days ago to make a trip of it and surprise me so I would not lose focus and such. Around noon, I got a message to call home, that's when my Mum said she was coming with the kids. They would see the sights while I did my job, but we could have breakfast together and dinner and I could be their Mum in the evenings - just like at home. Mum did not know I had run into Harry - a bonus really! I didn't tell him - I wanted it to be a surprise for him.

"Last thing I expected was to run into you two just as I introduced Harry to his children for the first time. Surreal if you ask me. But, I think it worked out. I don't hate you guys like I did this morning when I woke up. Maybe one day...

"Maybe," Lavender agreed. "Your Mum said something about tomorrow's Yankees game?"

"Seems we're going too," Hermione responded. "Mum got tickets."

"Yankees suck," Ron said.

"The Cubs fan speaks," Hermione exclaimed! "Well, as a Cardinals fan, that is one baseball thing we can agree on. Although ..."

"Although what?" Ron asked.

"My Sis thinks Derek Jeter is a hotty and she has decided to cheer for the Yankees!"

"TRAITOR," Ron exclaimed!

"I regret to agree with King Git, but he is right! No self respecting fan of the game - not from New York - is a true Yankees fan. You respect them, but you are bound by natural law to hate them too!"

"Well said," Ron replied. "Go Cubs!"

"I regret," Lavender added, "Hermione, I am a Cubs fan too, but at least we can agree on the need to hate the Yankees."

"Agreed."

"So, Hermione, you and Harry?"

"What do you mean?"

"Please! We saw you - before you saw us. You kissed and..."

"I think we are both hoping..."

"For?"

"We seem to still love each other and..."

"And?"

"But he has his life in London and mine is in St. Louis."

"So?"

"He has invited me to his - ah - picnic?"

"Oooh - that's perfect! That's a wonderful time!"

"I don't know - its..."

"Hermione," Lavender said, "he's my friend. I know him. Don't you dare let him go! He loves you and always has. Britain is not perfect, but there are those of us who believe in his version of it - those whose children attend the Severus school and are a part of the Severus system - we have the life you surely found here for your children. My oldest even plays baseball! You can - you must make it work! You both deserve to be happy, Hermione!"

"Agreed," Ron yawned.

"Mommy," a small voice interrupted. It was little Harry and Hermione could see he had an odd expression on his face.

"Are you all finished with your dinner?" she asked.

Little Harry knew he was not allowed to leave the table until he finished his dinner. He had eaten most of his pizza, but it was too much for him and he was full.

"No," he admitted, "but it was a big pizza. I'm full."

"Well, that's okay, I guess." Something else was bothering little Harry. Hermione recognized that frown on his face.

"What's wrong, Sweetie?"

"I'm mad at you!"

"Why? Why are you mad at me, Sweetie?"

"Because you never told us! You never told us about Daddy!"

"I told you lots of stories about him."

"You never told us that he's Harry Potter, the Harry Potter, the very famous Harry Potter and you never told us that you are the very famous Hermione from the books! Why?"

"It's not important."

"What? Why?"

"When did you find out who your Daddy was?"

"Just now."

"Before then, did you like him?"

"Yes. I like him a lot."

"So, you liked him before you knew he was Harry Potter?"

"Yeah."

"And did you like me when you woke up this morning?"

"I love you, Mommy!"

"And that has nothing to do with your being the son of Hermione Granger, right?"

"Right. It's because you're the best Mommy in the world!"

"And back home you and Luna have friends?"

"Yeah!"

"They like you?"

"Of course."

"They like you because you are Harry Granger, right?"

Little Harry nodded.

"They like you even though they do not know that your Mommy and Daddy are famous, right?"

"Right."

"Do you think it would have been the same if they knew?"

"Wouldn't it?"

"No, sweetie, it probably would not be the same. Ask your Daddy about being famous."

"I have."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He doesn't like it."

"And why not?"

"Because people want to be his friend because he's famous and not because they like him ... oh!"

"And I wanted you to like your Daddy because he's a wonderful Daddy and not because he's famous!"

"Oh! You mean, if you told us, we might not really like him right?"

"That's correct."

"Were you going to tell us, Mommy?"

"One day. I was going to tell you if your Daddy and I found each other. If that had not happened, it's something I was going to tell you when I decide to answer your 'Grown Up' questions."

"Why then?"

"I am not going to answer that because that, too, is a 'Grown Up' question."

"Okay. Do these people know who you and Daddy are?"

"They do. They went to school with us years ago, Sweetie."

"Oh ... OH! That's Ron Weasley, isn't it," Harry said pointing at Ron who was in the middle of a huge yawn and could only nod and waive back.

"It's rude to point, Sweetie, but yes that is!"

"Wow!"

"Now Harry, Mommy was talking with her old friends just now. What have I told you about interrupting people?"

"It's rude."

Hermione nodded. "And did you excuse yourself before you came over here and interrupted?"

"No," Harry said meekly.

"I want you to go back and say your sorry to Gran and your Daddy, okay?"

"Okay." Harry then leapt into his mother's arms and hugged her. "I love you Mommy! Even though you're really Hermione, you're my Mom!"

"Thanks Sweetie. I love you too, now do as you were told."

"Right," little Harry said as he climbed down and walked back to the others.

Ron yawned again. Hermione shook her head. Some things probably never change.

"Looks like my oldest one needs his nap," Lavender said. "Hermione?"

"Yes?"

"I want you to meet my kids and I want ours to meet. Ron's stayed here before and said the Sunday Brunch is to die for! Say the word, and I'll reserve a table for all of us at ten. That should give us time to sleep and plenty of time to make it to the game."

"Sounds like a plan," Hermione said. "I'd love to meet your children, Lavender."

"Love to stay, 'Mione, but it's pushing well past three in the morning our time. Ronnie's fading fast and I am not far behind. Sorry."

"I understand, Lav. You forget, I've got my own fading fasts to deal with!"

"True," Lavender laughed! "Be gentle with Harry - at least for tonight," she whispered.

"Lavender! I ..."

"Just a suggestion, Hermione," Lavender winked. She then stood up and led Ron away.

Hermione sat there for a moment. She had not paid much attention to Harry and the others while she went through the conversation with the two people she had long thought she hated most in the world. She could now see them in the distance at the far side of the Atrium. They were seated around a round table with a totally unnecessary umbrella, but it looked like an outdoor café. Harry's back was to her. Rose sat to Harry's right. She could not see Luna,

but guessed she was next to Rose. Then there was little Harry and Daphne and an empty chair next to Harry. They seemed so comfortable together, Hermione mused. To anyone else, they looked like - a family!

It took Hermione all of two seconds to make up her mind as she walked to rejoin her now complete family. This was going to work! For years she had plenty of first dates, few second dates and not one third date. Every man was found wanting in some respect. Every man but one, the one seated at that table right now. Hermione had long ago concluded that romance was so much nonsense. You don't just fall for someone. There was no such thing as a soul mate or whatever. But she did just fall for Harry - years ago. And if they were not meant to be together in the end, why didn't she ever have a real boyfriend?

I'll probably never be able to answer those questions, she thought to herself. And if this is what God meant for me, I won't even bother to try.

Hermione took her seat next to Harry. What happened next seemed to happen in slow motion. A memory was being created, one which would last for the rest of her life. Harry turned to her, concern on his face given she had had to face the demons of the past just as he had. She smiled at him to tell him all was well and he smiled back. She never would know who moved first - she would later like to think back on it as they seemed to move at the same time and in concert - but before she could think, her lips and Harry's were as one and she was in his arms again. Her mother, her sister, their children were watching, but she did not care at all. It was as it was supposed to have been: she and Harry - forever!

Their moment was soon interrupted by a small voice. "Gross!"

The kiss broke, but Harry and Hermione continued to stare into each other's eyes. Hermione had that smile on her face, her mouth partly opened, her lips and eyes smiling softy, her eyes sparking. Harry had never noticed this smile before that night when he first kissed her. It was the expression she wore after than kiss, and many more that followed. It was loving and inviting, full of wonder and joy and screamed to him to kiss her again - which was about all he could do in public. Who was Harry to deny her anything, he thought as he leaned in again and was welcomed enthusiastically.

"Yuck!," the voice replied, "they're doing it again!"

This time, they did not break apart simply in response to a complaint from one member of the audience, rather their kiss ended when it ended and not one second before. Hermione blushed and bit her lower lip. Harry had learned this one as well. She was content - for now.

"Yucky! Gross!" Little Harry complained. "Why were you kissing?"

"Because we like to," Harry answered.

"It's what mommy's and daddy's do, Sweetie," Hermione added, "especially when they love each other."

"Love is yucky," Little Harry complained.

"Is not," Luna and Daphne said in unison.

"Is too!"

"You say that now," Harry said. "But in ten years, you might not think so anymore."

"Will too!"

"We'll see," Hermione added.

"Do you love Daddy?" Luna asked.

"Yes, Sweetie, I do. I have for a long, long time."

"And do you love my Mommy?" Luna asked looking at Harry.

"Always have," Harry replied.

"Then why aren't you married?"

"Because we lost each other, Sweetie," Hermione replied. "We did not want to, but it happened."

"And now?"

"And now, your Daddy and I want to see," Hermione replied. "There are a lot of things we need to talk about and work out, but who knows."

"Are you going to marry Mommy?" Luna asked.

"Good question," Rose Granger added.

Harry laughed! "I never thought I'd get the 'what are your intentions' question from - my own daughter!"

"It's still a good question," Rose added.

"One day, maybe, if she'll have me," Harry replied. "But we'll see."

"Right now," Hermione added, "I'd say it's more likely than not, but not absolutely certain."

"Harry," Rose asked, "are you serious, or just saying this?"

"As serious as I can be for having just run into the love of my life for the first time in almost seven years only fifteen hours ago or so."

"And is this because of her or the children?"

"Her, most definitely. The children as well, but I would be thinking this way regardless."

"Thank you, Harry," Hermione whispered.

"Putting the cart before the horse, as it were, don't you think?" Rose asked.

"I'd prefer to think of it as better late than never," Harry said with a smile.

"And what are your thoughts about this, Janie?"

"Mother," Hermione said, 'while I am willing to discuss this new development with you and Harry and even both of you, I know where this conversation is going and I am not going there in front of the children, okay?'"

"We're having it tonight," Rose began to insist.

"Depends upon how Harry feels, Mum. How do you feel, Harry?"

"Whipped," he replied. "It's almost four in the morning in London. Way past my bedtime."

"Speaking about bedtime," Hermione began.

"Mommy," Harry and Luna complained!

"We wanna talk with Daddy more," Luna added.

"It's after eleven, well past your bedtimes," Hermione said. "I let you stay up to meet your Daddy, now it's off to bed."

"NO," they cried!

"Do you want to see more of Daddy?"

"Yes, Mommy."

"Then to bed. You can see Daddy tomorrow and the day after and the day after, but only if you go to bed and get a good night's sleep."

"Okay."

"Can Daddy tell us a bedtime story?" Luna asked.

"Only a short one and only if you ask him nicely."

"Please Daddy?" The two asked.

"Okay," Harry said, "but only after you three are tucked in."

"He's not my Daddy," Daphne said, "why do I have to tuck in?"

"Because I am still your Mum." Rose said, "and I say join your niece and nephew."

"Mother, I am eight!"

"And still not old enough to stay up 'til all hours, Love. Now do as your told."

"Yes Mum," Daphne sighed knowing it was futile to argue.

GRANGER ROOM

The children had brushed their teeth and changed into their 'jammies' and had been tucked into their beds. Little Harry had a bed to himself, while Luna and Daphne shared a huge bed. Harry sat on the end of little Harry's bed and did his best to face all three while Rose and Hermione stood behind to watch.

"Your Mum - or Sissy," Harry said, winking at Daphne when he said 'Sissy,' "she has told me she has told you 'Daddy Stories.'"

The kids were tired and merely nodded.

"Well, turnabout is fair play, so I am going to tell you a 'Mommy Story,' or a 'Sissy Story' if you prefer."

The children smiled at Harry who was smiling back.

"Once upon a time," Harry began, "in a land far across the sea, where there really are castles and Queens, Princes and Princesses and dragons, there lived a young couple who were not royalty or even magical. But, they loved each other so much and, even though they were still in school, they married. And like any husband and wife who truly love each other they wanted a child. One day, while still in school studying to be dentists, they had their child - a daughter - a most beautiful and magical little girl. Then again, all children are magical in a way. Still, their little princess was so magical to them. They gave her a name, a name befitting a fairy princess. They named her Hermione.

"What Hermione's parents did not know is that she was truly magical. She was a witch. Still, they loved her. She was smart and funny and when she did do magic by accident - as all magical children do - they found it strange in a way, yet it only made them love their Hermione more, for she was truly special in their eyes.

"When Hermione was old enough, she was sent to non-magical school, for in her land there was no magical school before one

turned eleven. She was so smart that many of the other children picked on her, so she decided books were all that mattered, especially because the other children could not read, write or learn as well as she did.

"While her parents loved her so, she really had no real friends and, even for a little girl as smart and as gifted as Hermione, not having friends is hard. She loved school and learning and reading, but hated going to school where she was teased and picked on - or ignored altogether. She worried - as did her parent's - that she might never have a true friend.

"Then one day, a couple months shy of her twelve birthday, a woman came to her home. The woman was a witch - but not just any witch. She was a very good witch and a teacher at a school that taught magic to witches and wizards. She was there to invite Hermione to attend and to tell her parents just how special Hermione really was. Her parents, as many are like, were taken aback. Like most people, magic was in fairy tales and not truly real. But it is real - it's just very rare. Her strange abilities now made sense and she was happy that maybe she was not odd or strange - as the children her age seemed to think. Her parents, while a little scared, decided to give this school a chance - anything if it might make their precious daughter happy.

"To get to this school, she had to ride a train all by herself along with all the other students who would attend. She was not onboard long, the train had barely left the station in London for its trip far to the north in Scotland, when she ran into a boy who was crying. He was a young wizard from a long line of magical folk stretching back centuries, but he was sad and scared. He had a pet toad he loved dearly and it was lost. She felt sorry for him and took it upon herself to help him find his pet Trevor. If you must know anything about Hermione, it is that she has always been kind hearted, selfless and brave - although there was nothing brave about hunting for Trevor. Well, for a child who knows no one, hunting through a train of magical folk that until very recently she did not know existed, maybe there was a bit of bravery there.

"In her search for Neville's toad Trevor, she entered a compartment where two boys were sitting. Like her, they were headed to this school for the first time. One was a son of a long line of witches and wizards and knew all about magic. The other was a famous young

wizard who knew nothing about magic or his fame, for his parents had died when he was just a baby and he had lived a life in a non-magical household - with relations who knew he was probably magical and hated magic. That boy had never had a friend before - not unlike our heroine Hermione.

"She bounces into the compartment, where the one boy without a friend thinks he had made one with the other, and she takes his breath away - she was so enchanting. She did not take much care in her outer appearance like many girls do, but there was an inner beauty he saw immediately.

"The other boy was trying to show off with a spell his older brother had taught him. He was going to turn his pet rat a different color. The problem was, his older brother was a prankster and had taught him nothing, except how to look foolish. He cast the fake spell in front of his new friend and Hermione, who had only just walked in and, of course, nothing happened.

"Hermione saw the other boy. He had a broken pair of glasses held together with tape and she decided to try her luck at a spell she read about in a book. Sure enough, she fixed his glasses to his great relief, and she became his friend forever. She would be only a friend for a while. However, he was always her friend even when no one else at school seemed to want to be. One day, they would become the best of friends, thanks to a Troll, but that is another story."

"Is that the end?" Little Harry asked.

"For now," Harry said. "It's time for sleep."

"Is that a true story?" Daphne asked.

"Indeed it is. It is about how I met your Sis, Daphne. Your Sis is Hermione and I was the boy with the broken glasses. It is true."

"Mommy, is it?" Luna asked. "Mommy, why are you crying?"

Harry looked and saw that Hermione was indeed crying.

"It's true," Hermione said, although with a hitch in her voice. "That was how your Daddy and I first met."

"Daddy tells good stories, Mommy."

"Indeed he does, Sweetie," Hermione added. "Now, it's time for bed. We'll see you in the morning, okay?"

"Okay, Mommy. Mommy?"

"Yes Dear?"

"Is it okay for me to love Daddy?"

"Yes," Hermione could not finish. The tears were almost overwhelming her and she walked into the adjoining room.

"Goodnight, you three," Harry said softly.

"Night Daddy," Luna said, as Harry kissed each on the forehead and left the room as well, making sure to turn off the lights as he left.

HERMIONE'S ROOM

Harry walked Hermione to her room in part because he wanted to spend every possible second with her and in part because she had asked.

"You are such a good story teller," she said.

"Practice," Harry replied. "You forget I have a little one at home as well."

"That was a lovely story."

"The truth - even a little decorated - I find it always works."

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"What have you thought about today?"

"Amazing," Harry said. "And if I was not so knackered, I might say this day was nearly perfect."

"Knackered?"

"Exhausted, Hermione. It's after four in the morning for me. I am wiped out!"

"Here we are," Hermione said. "This is my room."

"So, this is goodnight then?"

"You don't have to leave me, Harry."

"I'm knackered. I'd love to not leave you - I'd love to ..well. But I am practically asleep now."

"I don't mind. I really don't. I just am tired of being alone and I hate the nightmares. The few times since the War that I have not had them - it seems I was asleep in your arms. If you don't want more from me tonight, can you at least give me that peace?"

"Sure, provided..."

"Provided?"

"If I feel up to it later..."

"I would not invite you in otherwise."

"Thanks."

"Oh, and Harry?"

"Yes Love?"

"I agreed to do brunch with the Weasley's tomorrow. They have their kids here and I want to meet them. Do you mind?"

"It's been a day - might as well, 'Mione."

"Thank you, Harry. Now, let's get some sleep."

"Yes Dearest."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SUNDAY - JUNE 18, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

Harry woke up in the diffused light of an early Sunday morning. He barely remembered going to bed the night before. He knew where he was and whose curly, brown haired head was now resting upon his chest. It was a little after seven in the morning and Harry knew he had a decent night's sleep, one of the few that he had had over the years that did not involve alcohol. It seemed it was only with this woman that he could sleep without being hounded by his nightmares. He was amazed at how awake he was - in more ways than one.

His last memory was of Hermione coming from the bathroom to join him. The room was already dark and he could barely see her at all. He knew she was wearing a tee shirt of some kind, he could feel that when she crawled into his arms. Harry was shirtless, as he was most summer evenings at home. He remembered her kissing him goodnight and settling her head against his chest. He knew, once his arms were around her, he had fallen into a peaceful sleep and dreamt about this woman in his arms right now. He loved how he felt: warm, loved and safe. He never wanted to sleep alone again, although for a time he knew he would not have that option.

He wondered if she was awake, but was not about to try and wake her if she was asleep. He squeezed his arms around her to feel as close to her as he could, hoping not to wake her all the same. He heard a sigh escape what he thought were the most amazing lips in the world and hoped she was dreaming of him. He felt content just holding her to him.

Hermione had woken up only a few seconds after Harry. She lay there with her eyes closed listening to his heart beating. She could stay like this all day, being warm and held. She had forgotten how wonderful it was. Then again it was not like she had a lot of experience, she thought. Just those few wonderful days almost seven years ago. Still, she was amazed she had missed this so much. She missed holding him and being held by him. It seems for years that had been almost the full extent of their more romantic relationship. He kissed her, as she did him, but not like yesterday - not until their final days together did she finally really kiss Harry. Whatever doubts she had had about how she felt about him had vanished with that first kiss just as whatever doubts she had about

how she still felt about him vanished when their lips first touched last night.

She felt Harry's strong arms tighten around her and pull her gently closer to him. She sighed, for she loved being close to him. She loved it more than anything. She had thought about that night for years. Harry had been her first real kiss. He was not the first boy she had kissed, but it was her first - and so far only - real kiss. For years, even a simple kiss on the cheek from Harry seemed to have made her go weak at the knees. With Viktor, following their one and only date, his short kiss good night, she had felt nothing. With Ron, yes she had felt something, but not like that. With Ron, it was snogging, Ron trying to control or even overwhelm her. He never succeeded. With Harry, she was overwhelmed immediately and knew he was not trying. It was never snogging with him. She felt as if they were truly sharing something amazing.

Hermione had been very strait laced as a girl and young woman. She never dreamed of getting seriously physical before marriage. She was nineteen when she caught Ron and Lavender, still a virgin and had no desire to lose her innocence until her wedding night. She thought about that. Most of the girls she knew in school, all of her friends except maybe Luna, had lost their virginity before they finished, many before they even had turned sixteen. Ginny had waited until one minute after midnight on her seventeenth birthday before she stole into Harry's room at his place in London and threw caution and her innocence to the wind. Hermione remembered that conversation - it was all Ginny talked about for weeks after Hermione had returned to school.

She knew a fair amount about sex, Hermione did. She had heard graphic details from her friends about what they did with their boyfriends whenever they could get away with it. Hermione thought about it years later. Why hadn't she? One reason she knew is a part of her did not feel pretty and found it hard to believe any boy might be interested in that with her. Ron proved her wrong on that score, but she was not really interested in that from him. She should have figured that bit out - that she did not really love him, rather she was settling with him because she did not think she could ever be with the one she loved. Then she was. Then he kissed her as a woman for the first time in her life - as a lover. Scared as she was, she was his in every sense within an hour of that first kiss. She had been terrified, yet he seemed to sense it. He was so kind and gentle that

she gave into to her passion far more readily than she thought ought be possible.

She was afraid it would hurt the first time. She was not disappointed. It had, but only for a moment and Harry had not forced the issue. He had allowed her to get used to having him inside before he really began. When he did, she was ready. Until that moment, she really had wondered what all the fuss was about. She then knew that most of her girlfriends probably had never really had a good lover. What she experienced that first time, and every time afterwards for the next few days was far more amazing than any of the stories her more experienced friends had told her. She remembered that long before she was overwhelmed by her very first orgasm, for the first time in her life, she stopped thinking altogether and was just lost in the ecstasy of Harry.

They made love four times that first night. Four times, she had been driven thoughtless by the pleasure Harry created and four times she had brought Harry over the edge, just as she was falling over the precipice herself. By the second time, she knew he was fantastic and it would take a miracle for her to find his equal, a miracle she did not want to have to experience. By the second time, all she wanted to do was make love to him for the rest of their lives. The third time, Harry had taken her to her first of what would be several multiple orgasms over the next few days. She was so sore the next morning, but enjoyed waking up naked in Harry's arms anyway. She was so sore she was sure she would not be able to experience that again for weeks. Harry understood when she told him. What she did not immediately understand was what Harry had meant by there were other ways to achieve the same result.

After several amazing minutes with Harry's face between her legs, not a half hour after waking up that wonderful morning, she knew he could truly do anything. What shocked her was how much she enjoyed pleasuring him. Minutes after being on the receiving end of a sexual experience she had once considered at least intellectually disgusting, she had Harry in her mouth and enjoyed pleasuring him at least as much as she had enjoyed being pleased. Even after he warned her what was about to happen next, giving her a chance to stop just short, she had continued with almost renewed vigor. She had wanted Harry in her - all of Harry. It was not nearly as bad as she expected and knowing she had brought him there made it the height of erotic enjoyment for her. To this day she was certain that

when she walked aboard that flight that took Harry and her apart, she was walking funny, yet she did not mind.

On the drive to the airport, they both had said it had been a mistake. She knew that was a lie even then. A mistake is doing it once. In the sixty hours they had been lovers, they had made love at least twenty-five times, almost half of which she had initiated, and that did not include other ways they had brought each other to their special place. That was not mistake. The mistake was letting Harry go. That was seven years ago, this was today. She knew he would be just as amazing as he was then and this time, he would not get away and she would not run away.

She sighed again and stretched her arm across Harry as he squeezed her just a little more. She moved and turned so that they were now face to face, inches apart and staring into each others eyes. She dragged her upper leg across his legs and slowing up, almost to his waist as absently as she could. When it reached him, she realized he must have been thinking the same thing she was.

"Good Morning," Harry said as innocently as he could.

Hermione did not answer him verbally. She moved closer and kissed him for as long as she could stand. When they finally broke, she looked into his eyes and smiled at him for several long moments before she finally had the courage to speak her mind.

"Good Morning, Darling," she said. "Sleep well?"

"Never better."

"You still tired?"

"Wide awake. Just enjoying the view."

"I've noticed you're awake."

"Have you now?"

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"Make love to me, please?"

LATER

Hermione had called a few minutes earlier to say that she and Harry were coming up. She then asked her mother to make sure that everyone was wearing their Cardinals Jerseys. Her Mum found that odd, considering that while she always gave in in the end, she always had complained about packing them for vacation. As much as Hermione loved that team, she could not fathom why one would want to wear a jersey at Disney World or the Grand Canyon or anywhere that was not a Cardinals game.

"You are not planning on walking around New York, much less Yankee Stadium like that are you dear?" Mrs. Granger had asked.

"No Mother. We'll change before we leave the hotel. But we are having brunch with the Weasley's this morning - I want to meet their kids who are here - and they are Cubs fans, so..."

"You sure you're a good witch," her mother teased.

"Only when it counts," Hermione replied. Oddly, Mrs. Granger loved the idea.

Hermione and Harry showed up at her door as the kids were washing up and getting dressed next door. Mrs. Granger noted three things. First, that Harry was also wearing a baseball Jersey. Hermione had on her Jim Edmonds Jersey and red Cardinals ball cap. Her hair was in a pony tail. Harry wore a blue cap with a red bill and a white "A" on it to go with his John Smoltz Atlanta Braves Jersey. Baseball! She also noticed they were holding hands and certain of their mannerisms, subtle to be sure, told her that if they had spent two minutes more than an inch apart since they had left the room last night, it would have been a miracle. She was sure they had been very intimate.

"Alright you two," Mrs. Granger said, "what went on last night?"

"What do you mean, Mother?" Hermione asked innocently. "You were with us until almost midnight."

"After you left, what happened? Where you intimate?"

"Define intimate," Harry said.

"Did you sleep together?"

"In the same bed?"

"That's the idea. Did you?"

"I swear, I fell asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow."

"Wasn't that fast, dear," Hermione said. "But he did fall asleep as soon as he had his arms around me, Mother."

"So you had sex last night?"

"Heavens no," Hermione said in mock horror.

"Honestly, Mrs. Granger. I fell right asleep."

"But you were in the same bed?"

"Okay, that bit is true, but I had the most honorable of intentions."

"Did you now!"

"I really just wanted a decent night's sleep. That's all."

"And how does sleeping with my daughter do that, pray tell?"

"For once, I did not have nightmares about the War. Best night's sleep I had in years."

"I see. So you did not have sex with my daughter."

"Not last night, no."

"Then you did?"

"I've never had sex with your daughter. We made love. Big difference."

"So you admit to that, eh?"

"The evidence is in the next room, isn't it?"

"Well, that's partly my point."

"What is your point, Mother?" Hermione asked.

"You were intimate once, and look what happened!"

"I thought you loved them," Hermione began.

"I do, Dear! That's not what I meant. What I meant is that you should never have had to go through this alone."

"Mum, I didn't. You've been with me every step of the way and," Hermione began to tear up, "and we have never been closer. Never! I love you so much, Mummy. I always have, but not like since I found you and had to tell you about the babies. You have any idea how scared I was? I was never as close to you before as I was to Daddy. But ever since that day, you have been - well amazing! I could never have done any of this without you and I fancy I am a wonderful Mother and that's your doing - not mine. You helped me in ways you cannot imagine. Were it not for you, I might not have gone to school because of the little ones, yet I did. Because it brought me closer to you - our accident years ago is the best thing that ever happened to me. Still..."

"Still?"

"Harry should have known. They're his children too. You know what we thought - that he didn't care. Do you think that now?"

"No. He was - well - he was what you told me he was. I believe he would have been there for you."

Hermione nodded. "It's not his fault he never had that chance before yesterday. It was his girlfriend's fault, his wife's fault. She stole my letters to him and he never knew."

"Harry," Mrs. Granger asked, "had you known?"

"Assuming none of my letters were stolen, I would have learned of Hermione months before I got married. I'm almost certain I would

have dumped that bitch to have a shot at being with your daughter. I just did not know that she feels for me what she does or that she has given me the one thing my ex absolutely would not - a family. I meant what I said last night, Ma'am. I don't want to lose your daughter ever again. What Hermione and I need to work on now is - I hope - simply a question of logistics."

"Logistics?"

"She lives in St. Louis, I in London. We need to work that bit out. We also need to get to know each other again - to catch up as it were. But I'd like to think that it is merely a question of logistics. Haven't had much time to think that one out yet. I only found her about twenty-five hours ago."

"So you two did not make love last night?" Mrs. Granger said in disbelief.

"No Ma'am. Honestly, we did not."

"Well, that's a load off my mind," she began...

"But..."

"Harry," Hermione whispered in fear.

"If you had asked since sunrise or even in the last hour, I might have a different answer," Harry finished.

"I don't believe you," Hermione began.

"If you think I am going to lie to your mother, Hermione," Harry countered. "But I do agree with you, My Angel. Certain things are really none of her business."

"What?" Rose Granger began.

"Angel?" Hermione asked. She turned to look into Harry's eyes.

"Since I was eleven, Hermione," Harry said, focusing on her but talking loud enough for her mother to hear, "I have stared certain death in the face countless times. For years, you were either by my side, helping me or my inspiration to live. Since you left, your

memory has lived with me and carried me on. Were it not for you, I'd have died countless times over the past fifteen years. You are my Guardian Angel. So long as I believe you care I cannot die, Hermione, at least not violently."

This was not romantic sophistry at all and both women saw that. Harry truly believed what he had just said.

Rose fell silent. Whatever she had thought about this young man had changed over the last day. He was not the useless father or uncaring friend she had thought him to be. She could see by the way he and her daughter looked at each other that they loved each other and had been torn apart not by choice. She had seen the way he was towards the children. So few men were as good. Her daughter had better not mess this one up, she thought.

Hermione could not believe what Harry had just said. He had said what she had felt. They were not two people - well they were - but they were one. Together, they were far better than when they were apart. This must work, she thought. This has to! This is my and his last, best chance at happiness. She threw herself into his arms and kissed him.

"Yuck," a little voice said. "Gross! They're doing it again!"

"Oh Harry, you're such a jerk," another voice added.

"Am not, Daph!"

"You boys are such dunderheads!"

"Am not!"

"Are so," a third voice said!

"Am not!"

"Kids," Rose began, "knock it off! And Harry, it looks like you'll have to just learn to live with this, okay?"

"It's yucky!"

"And I don't think your mother or father cares what you think, young man."

"It's still yucky!"

"So's leaving the toilet seat up, dufus," Daphne said.

"Why does that matter?"

The kiss broke as Harry began to laugh. Hermione looked at him wondering what he found funny.

"Harry?" Harry asked.

"What?"

"Do you leave the toilet seat up at home?"

"Yeah, so what?"

"You live with a bunch of girls and you leave the toilet seat up?"

"So?"

"So, having learned the hard way myself, don't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because they don't like it, okay?"

"Why not?"

Great, Harry thought. I am his father biologically, but not really his father. Not yet. Is it my place to tell him such details? He's only six!
"Because boys and girls are different."

"Why?"

"Because they are."

"How?"

"For now," Hermione said, "we can leave it as they are. Okay?"

"Why?"

"Because," Harry said, "girls have to pee too, okay?"

"They do?"

"Yes, Harry they do! And they have to do it sitting down."

"Why?"

"Because they are girls, okay?"

"Why?"

"Look, that's all I can tell you now. But they consider it the height of rudeness for them to walk into a bathroom and finding the toilet seat up. So when they say don't do that, don't! Okay?"

"It's stupid!"

"Maybe, but that's the way things are so get used to it and be nice to your Gran, your Mum, your Aunt and sister, okay?"

"I'll try."

"I can't believe it," Rose said.

"What," Harry asked?

"Little Harry has never said that before."

"Rebelling against the estrogen," Harry said. "Never had another male to tell him to do otherwise, I guess. Although..."

"Although?"

"I'll have to get Teddy trained up too."

"Why?"

"I asked Hermione yesterday," Harry said. "I invited her and the rest of you to join Teddy and me on Holiday, beginning with my end of

July bar-be-que picnic in England and ending with a trip to Disney World."

"Not Euro-Disney!"

"No Ma'am. Teddy thinks its crap as much as I do. When we lived in Atlanta, we'd go to Orlando in the summer."

"Wait a minute! You lived in the States? When?"

"Two years, 2002 and 2003. I was assigned to the Atlanta Field Office of the F.B.I. with my American mentor. We had been partners for over three years by then. Long story as to how that happened, but Teddy and I learned to love baseball and real bar-be-que and this Country."

"You are not talking about grilling?"

"That too, but I am talking about slow smoked ribs and brisket. My specialty. My picnic has been held around my birthday ever since Teddy and I returned to Britain. A bunch of us were sent to the States to learn and get degrees. I got my Masters in Political Science from Georgia Tech and worked as an F.B.I. Magical Agent. Other friends were elsewhere. My picnic is with them, our American friends and their families and others. We grill, Bar-be-que, eat chili and Mexican foods, play baseball, Quidditch, football - sorry soccer - swim in the lake near my house and have a grand old time. I invited Hermione yesterday, suggesting she could then invite Teddy and me to St. Louis and hope to change our minds about the Atlanta Braves, and then we could all spend a week or so at Teddy's favorite place - Disney World. He and I go every year, you know."

"And just how are we going to fly to England and back?" Rose began.

"I'm planning to pay for that. You are my guests, least I can do."

"Can you afford that?"

"Easily, Ma'am. I mostly live off what I make at work, but I earn so much more. My annual income is at least nine million pounds a year - well six point five after taxes. No worries about a few plane tickets."

"So you're rich?"

"Comfortable," Harry said. "I live in my place in London most of the year. Teddy's magical primary school is only a block away. I have my vehicles - my Aston Martin, Land Rover and motorcycle. In the summer, I can choose between my parents' cottage in Godric's Hollow and my family manor outside Oxford. My London place is big, but the Manor is huge and on a large property. That's where I hold my picnic. Lord Potter, Ma'am. Thirty-fourth Earl of Godricston - seat in the House of Lords for generations and such. Course, I only show up for that nonsense for the Queen, but there you go."

"Bloody hell," Rose said!

"Too right you are. I am hoping, Ma'am, that Hermione will take me off the market as it were. I am so tired of every witch old enough to breed thinking she could be the next Lady Potter. Bloody annoying if you want my opinion. All I want - all I have ever wanted is your daughter, previous mistake of a marriage notwithstanding."

"Wow," which was all Rose could bring herself to say.

"Now, shall we," Harry asked?

It was obvious he meant the brunch and Hermione added, "We shall!"

WEASLEY ROOM

It was a little after eight in the morning when Ron and Lavender woke up. Their youngest, Arthur was asleep in a portable crib near there bed. Arthur reminded Lav of his father. Given his druthers, Ron would sleep until noon and little Artie loved to sleep in and had practically from the time he was two weeks old. They had both been exhausted when they finally had put all their children to be last night. Their girls were in the adjoining room and Lavender's Mum was just across the hall.

"Knut for your thoughts?" Lavender asked her husband.

"Last night," Ron replied.

"Mmmm, I thought as much. What about last night?"

"The whole thing was..."

"Unexpected?"

"Understatement."

"Talk to me Lover," Lavender said.

Ron did not need to be asked twice. With the exception of the first time he had dated his love, he had never had difficulty talking to her. "Well, I'd love to say I was stunned to see Harry was here, but when I heard that Parker was not going to be here, that thought did cross my mind. But what does Harry know about purchasing, honestly?"

"He's Deputy Head of his Department," Lavender said. "Wouldn't be a bit surprised if he became Head when Savage retires. Maybe they wanted him to learn this?"

Ron nodded. "Probably. Still, I didn't really expect to run into him. If you had not come with me on this trip, I would have avoided him like the Dragon Pox."

"Instead you took my advice."

"Should have taken your advice years ago when Harry filed for annulment. He and I were not best of Mates, but we were still friends. You advised me not to take sides and let those two sort things out. Right up until the hearing, my family sympathized with Ginny, but only I supported her. Like a fool I believed her, and like a fool was the only one on her side when it all ended. I lost the best friend I had all because I wanted to believe and stand by that selfish, conniving, totally mental bitch. I hadn't spoken to Harry since before he left for the States. I was so ashamed for standing up for her - how could I talk to him?"

"I know love, but you did."

"I was terrified to, Lav," Ron admitted. "I would not have blamed him for a moment if he had hexed me into oblivion after what had happened."

"But?"

"I was so surprised at how that went, Lav. Okay, I don't think it'll ever be the same way between us as it was years ago, but at least I think I can come to the picnic with you this year."

"I'd like that, Ron. I always said he would not kick you out and I know he won't, unless..."

"Unless?"

"Draco is a friend of his - not best Mates - but a friend. You are not allowed to openly dislike him, Love."

Ron grumbled. "I still think he's a Git. But, so long as your with me, I promise not to openly hate Ferret Face."

"Deal."

"But Hermione? After all these years," Ron went on. "I was gob smacked! You know I never believed most of the crap in the papers about her. I never believed she died or ran off with some Rock Star, or lost her powers and was a Muggle or was really a space alien. Okay, that one was almost believable in a way. But if you had told me yesterday morning that I would run into her as well, I would have had you committed to the St. Mungo's Ward for Permanent Spell Damage."

Lavender giggled. "You and me both, Love."

"That talk went even better than the one with Harry, I thought. I mean, maybe not for me, but she forgave you, Lav. That's all that really matters to me."

"Thank you, Love."

"And they seem to be a couple! And they had children! Bloody Hell!"

"You have a problem with that?"

"No, Love, I don't. I probably would have years ago. But no. I just hope they can make it work between them. They both deserve to be happy. If they are ever as happy as we are, it might make these last seven years seem worth it. I really do miss them."

"I know, Love, but one step at a time."

"I know."

"Thank you for being Harry's friend all these years, Love. At least I feel like I know a little about him."

"I know. But I was his friend because..."

"I am so sorry, Lav."

"Do you really love me?"

"I love you more than life itself. And if I don't tell you that a thousand times a day, I mean to."

The cries from the room ended the conversation.

"Bugger," Ron said, "the Barbarian Hoard is at the gates!"

Lavender laughed as the two of them got out of bed to start their new day.

"So Love," Lavender said as the Weasley clan left their room, "why are we wearing our Cubs kit?"

"Your Mum's not," Ron observed.

"I meant the rest of us!"

"You heard last night. The Grangers are from St. Louis. Cardinals fans if anything. You know the kids love this kit and would kill us if they had to wait for Chicago to wear it and besides..."

"You trying to rile them up?"

"No," Ron said. "Just want them to know that even though we are from England, we're fans too."

"Of their arch rivals!"

"Love, it's not like the Yankees - Red Sox. It's not. Not even in a pennant race. The fans are mad for their teams but not with each other. Besides..."

"What?" Lavender asked.

"Galleon says Hermione is in a Cardinals Jersey. Double or nothing the lot of them are - well, maybe not Harry."

"You're on, Mister!"

ATRIUM

They entered the Atrium and saw a family that had one half of a table to themselves. All but one where in red tops with the red birds on a bat and the word Cardinals emblazoned over it. Their children saw the one stand out.

"It's Uncle Harry," Gabbie shrieked! She tore away from the adults with her three sisters all yelling "Uncle Harry!" at the top of their lungs.

"Unca Hawy," their youngest said. "Unca Hawy!" But little Artie was kept behind.

"We'll be there in a bit, Dear," Lavender said to her boy as the adults walked over to the table.

"Pay up, Love," Ron said. "Two galleons!"

"You can be such a bastard," Lavender whispered with a laugh in her voice.

"I know. But a bet's a bet."

"Good morning, Harry and Janie," Lavender said as she, Ron and their son reached the table.

"Good morning," they replied.

"Janie?" Ron asked.

"Sure. She told us yesterday she's been called Janie since she left home. I am guessing she's not used to being called Hermione. Might even make her a bit uncomfortable, Ron. Besides - mind you I just thinking and it's up to them - but if we remember to call her Janie, we can tell people that Harry has a serious girl friend without spilling the beans about it being his one and only - his Hermione. What do you two think?"

"I don't know," Harry began.

"Which part?" Hermione asked. "About Lavender telling people you have a serious girlfriend or about your having a serious girlfriend?"

"Hermione, it's about telling - at least for now."

"Are you embarrassed by me?" She said it somewhat teasingly, but there was a serious side to that question.

"No! Absolutely not, Hermione! I'd just rather wait until the picnic to let the British Wizarding World know about you - about you, Hermione, not about us. Are we serious? I'd like to think so. I think we are. I am more than willing to let Lav loose to tell the women back home that I am definitely off the market. It's just that your being gone has been big news for years. If people know I am dating an American named Janie, the press might annoy me, but not you. Otherwise, there'll be reporters at your door in St. Louis within a week. You don't need that, do you?"

"Thank you, Harry," Hermione said kissing him on the cheek. "Lav, I think you can say what you want - but I think it might be fun for the world to learn that Hermione Granger is not dead later - like at Harry's picnic."

"My thoughts exactly," Lav said. "Most of the guests will be gob smacked when they see it's you, Janie." Lavender giggled a little. "I can't wait to see their faces. And oooh, will Parvati freak when she finds out I knew all along! Our secret?"

"Our secret for now," Hermione agreed.

"Right then," Lav went on. "I think introductions are in order." She looked at Hermione's Mum. "I am Lavender Weasley and this is my husband Ron."

Rose Granger starred at the blonde headed witch with daggers in her eyes. These were the two, the two who had almost ruined her daughter's life and definitely broke her heart.

"Mum, it's okay," Hermione said. "It was a long time ago and I am mostly over it. Besides, if what happened had not happened, I might well have married the wrong man. In a way, I thank them for what they did because I found, lost, then found Harry again because of then."

"If you are fine with it, Dear," Rose began.

"I am, Mum."

Rose relaxed.

"This is my mother Carol Brown," Lavender added indicating the woman who looked like a slightly older version of her daughter.

"Pleasure," Hermione said.

"And, these are the Barbarian Hoard," Ron laughed indicating the four blonde to strawberry blonde children each, Hermione noted, had deep blue eyes.

"This is our oldest," Lavender continued placing her hand on the tallest girl, "Gabrielle. Everyone calls her Gabbie. She always preferred that name and besides, it suits her. Give her a chance and she'll talk your ears off. She's seven.

"This next one," she said as she moved behind the next tallest girl, "is our Miracle Molly. She's five.

"Our youngest daughter is Roselyn, but we call her Rosie. She's three.

"The little boy Ronnie is holding is Arthur. We call him Artie to as not to confuse him with his Granddad. He's eighteen months old and is becoming a little terror. I swear the girls were much easier at his age," Lavender laughed.

"Finally," Lavender said placing her hands on her belly, "there is the Weasley to be named later."

"You're expecting?" Rose asked.

Lavender nodded with a radiant smile. She loved being pregnant.

"I forgot to ask," Hermione said. "When are you due?"

"The Healer's think around the end on January. They'll have a better estimate at my next appointment."

"Congratulations," Rose said.

"Thanks."

Everyone took their seats at the table just as a waiter arrived. With the breakfasts ordered, the table erupted into several different conversations. Harry could hear the older children and mostly Gabbie and Daphne talking about baseball. Gabbie was excited to be going to her first real baseball game and even more so that it was with her Daddy. She was more excited about the game next week when Daddy was taking the family to see the Chicago Cubs - her favorite team - play the Milwaukee Brewers at Wrigley Field in Chicago. The two older girls also played on baseball teams and talked about playing with each other. The two grandmothers were talking about seeing the sights and what they planned to do with their week in New York. Hermione was talking with Lavender.

"Five kids, Lav?" Hermione asked.

"Seems like a lot, doesn't it?" Lavender replied. "It's not that bad. Not really. Gabbie's old enough to help out and she usually does. Ron calls her the Enforcer, 'cause any rule breaking by the others is duly reported."

"What about her rule breaking?"

"Requires effective interrogation technique absent evidence that only an eight year old could have done it," Lavender laughed.

"Still? I might say it looks like a Weasley thing, except they most have boys, right?"

"We're having five because I want them. You know I was an only child like you. I love having these darlings. I love that they are all different and that they all have siblings. I'm not yet going to categorically say that I'm done cranking them out. One day, I know I'll hit a wall as it were and I'll be done. It might be with this one, but if not and if Ron can stand the madness, maybe..."

"And, by the way, Ron's generation of Weasleys is cranking out girls left and right. Ron says that Ginny broke the all boy curse, although I think that's nonsense."

"I knew Bill and Fleur had a daughter," Hermione said. "But I know nothing about the others."

"As you know then, Bill and Fleur had Victorie on May 11, 1999, the first anniversary of the start of the Battle of Hogwarts that ended the War. You remember the battle ended when Harry killed Voldemort just before sunrise on the 12th. Still, she named her Victorie in honor of the Battle - and because Fleur had been pregnant when she fought there and had miscarried on the 12th after the battle."

"I didn't know that!"

"Few did. We only found out a couple of years ago. Took a while for Fleur to come to terms with that."

"Anyway, they had Dominique - their second daughter - on March 6th, 2001. Their first son Louis on October 31st 2003 and Fleur gave birth to twins - Colette and William this past May 5th. The boys are red heads like their father. The girls take after their Mum."

"That'll be fun in a few years," Hermione laughed.

"Every boy in school will be chasing them," Lavender agreed. "Charlie is not married, but he has a serious girlfriend he met in Kiev - Tatiana. We'll see about that one."

"Percy - oh my! You know he was the first Weasley boy to marry?"

"He was?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"He became persona non grata in his family in the summer of '96. December that year, he married Penelope Clearwater. The only relation in attendance was his Aunt Muriel, who none of the others can stand. I don't like her much either. Anyway, they had their first child, Artimus, in November of '97. Rachel was born in June of '99, Christine in March of '01, Lance in November of '02, Edward in August of '04 and little Maggie this past February. They are the only Weasleys with all red hair in this generation."

"Six," Hermione asked?

"Yeah. Not sure if Penelope is done either to be honest."

"Goodness!"

"Then there's George. Bit of a late start for him. He married Angelina Johnson - finally - in May of last year. Their first child - a boy they're going to name Fred after his brother - he's due in August."

"That's a lot of kids!"

"Not really, not now anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"Most magical folk who have been married as long as Ron and I have have at least three children, usually more. Bit of a Baby Boom since the War ended. There was one after the last war as well, but not nearly like this."

"What do you mean?"

"Our class at Hogwarts was the smallest in decades. There were only forty-two of us. It also had the highest proportion of children without magical heritage in years. Close to forty percent."

"What's that?"

"Used to be known as Muggle Borns."

"Oh."

"An average class over the last two centuries had between fifty-five and sixty. Twenty-five percent of those were Muggle Born, on average.

"The year after us had fifty-seven and the year after them about sixty eight students, then the numbers returned to the normal range. But now!"

"Now?"

"When Vicky starts Hogwarts..."

"Vicky?"

"Sorry, Victorie, Bill and Fleur's girl. Only Fleur and her family call her Victorie. Everyone else calls her Vicky. Anyway, the year before hers - Teddy's year - they might be as small as we were. It is estimated Vicky's year might push eighty. Artie? By the time he starts, it may be well over one hundred. They say they may have to build more schools by then if the schools that do exist can't expand to take on the boom. Hogwarts, of course, can. Some of the others?"

"And it's not just children of magic, Janie! The Muggle Born births are way up as well apparently."

"Why?"

"No one knows for sure."

Harry laughed.

"What's so funny," Hermione asked?

"She's right. Bit of a breed-a-thon going on in magical Britain. We've had to open two new Severus System Primary Schools in London the past couple of years due to the increase in magical births. Throw in the fact that more and more magical parents want their children to attend, and the supply is far short of the demand. We cater to the children without magical families, but we want all magical children to attend. In addition to the three London area schools, seven more are now open and two more open their doors this fall. The magical child education business is booming!"

"And you're paying for it?"

"A lot. We do require tuition from those who can afford it and we have loads of donations pouring in. The Weasley companies pay a huge amount - tax reasons. But there is now a Bill before the Magical Parliament to help pay for the costs and make magical primary school compulsory within ten years, so maybe I won't have to spend a small fortune educating our youth."

"Sounds like things are really busy back home," Hermione said.

"A lot has changed," Harry agreed, "mostly for the better."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SUNDAY - JUNE 25, 2006 - BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT 77 NEW YORK TO LONDON SOMEWHERE OVER THE NORTH ATLANTIC

Three and a half hours into his flight to London, Harry finally closed his laptop. He had extended his stay in New York by one more day. He wanted one more day with Hermione and the kids. Actually, he wanted hundreds and thousands of more days with them. For now, the week was all he could manage with their jobs demanding their return.

Harry reflected back over the past week and was amazed at all of it. It turned out by accident, the Weasleys were seated right in front of Harry and the Grangers at the baseball game. Harry managed to catch a foul ball, the first time he had ever done that. He gave the ball to little Harry who seemed thrilled, especially when the hitter sent a note saying that if they wanted he would sign it for them. Soon, little Harry had a ball autographed by Jason Giambi. Little Harry became a Yankees fan right until the end of the game when the Yankees lost to the worst team in the National League - the Washington Nationals 5 to 4.

Hermione's Mum had brought a camera with her as had Lavender and her Mum. They took pictures of each of the families at the game, in front of Yankees stadium and in the seats as well. The Weasleys and Grangers agreed to see the sights together over the week while Harry, Hermione and Ron worked. More pictures. They went to the Empire State Building, Ellis Island and the Statute of Liberty, several museums, the U.S.S. Intrepid and other sights. They shopped in both the magical shopping district near the Battery and the non-magical one on Fifth Avenue. They spent a day in Central Park. Harry had all the pictures on his computer and now had restarted it so he could look at his family.

For the last week, Harry had breakfast with what he now knew was his family. He and Hermione shared a room and bed, and it was amazing being with her again. He loved waking up with her in his arms and loved falling asleep that way. While breakfast was with everyone, lunch usually was just the three former friends. Harry knew things would never be the way they once were. But the fact that he no longer hated Ron was a good thing, wasn't it? Hermione seemed comfortable with her old friend as well and lunch frequently

led to remembering the good times they had once had together - and the trouble they had caused.

Dinner was more intimate. Harry ate with Hermione and her family. He would then spend time with them until he and Hermione put them to bed. The old friends would then spend some time with Hermione's Mum before returning to their room to get ready for the next day and continue to fan the flames of their romance.

Harry had renewed his invitation for Hermione and her family to come to Britain at the end of July for his picnic. She accepted and they had already planned it out. Hermione booked magical portal for herself, her Mum and the kids on July 22. She had never traveled by international portal before, although she did know about it. Between 8:00 and 8:30 on July 22, her family would pass through a door at St. Louis Lambert International Airport and exit the door in Heathrow Airport, London. Once they cleared customs, Harry would be waiting to pick them up and take them back to Grimmauld Place.

It was less than a month away, Harry thought, but still it was not soon enough. He missed them already. He really missed Hermione. He knew he was in love with her and was certain she was in love with him. He never wanted to lose her again. Somewhere over the Atlantic, just before slipping off into a peaceful sleep, Harry decided that he was going to ask her to marry him - something he knew he should have done many years ago. He would take her to dinner the night she arrived and ask her. If she said yes, he would then try and convince her to get married the following Saturday at the picnic. Why not? The location was beautiful and there was a ready made reception already planned? It seemed perfect. Soon, Harry was asleep dreaming of Hermione in a white dress - and without one.

SUNDAY - JUNE, 25, 2006 - SOUTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT 1327 NEW YORK TO ST. LOUIS SOMEWHERE OVER OHIO

They were seated at the front of the plane and were the first to board. They had taken seats in the front row - two sets of three seats facing each other on the right hand side of the plane. Hermione had always liked this airline. True, it was no frills and inexpensive, but she felt it was family friendly while most other carriers were not. Little Harry and Daphne sat by the windows watching the ground below and trying to guess where they were with the help of a road map Daphne had brought along. Luna sat next to

Daphne and Rose next to her. Hermione sat next to little Harry. She was working at her laptop.

She knew her employers would be very pleased with the results of her trip. In addition to the bids she had prepared for Harry, and by extension the British Magical Government, Harry had introduced her to several of his European counterparts. She now had bid proposals from Magical Interpol as well as several European countries - far more than her employers had anticipated. It would be more than enough, she had thought. They would have to open up a European Office.

Her boss, Hank Riley had mentioned that if this show went well, it would be necessary to build a plant somewhere in Europe to meet the demand. Hermione thought maybe more than one. She had been told that she was first in line to head up European operations. She had lived there after all and spoke French and a little Italian. Jack was thinking Paris, but Hermione now knew it would be London. As the potential head of the European Operations, she could make the recommendation and as several Americans would have to move, London was the best choice for their families. They spoke English, for one and based upon what she had learned from Harry this week, the children could attend the Severus School and not lose ground in their education - as they would in France.

Harry, she now thought. She knew she was in love with him and it hurt to leave him again. It could not be helped, not yet, but it still hurt. It had only been a few hours and she already missed him. Their children did too. Harry was certainly a wonderful father, she thought. In the evenings, he took time to get to know their children and sent them to bed every night with a new "Hermione" story to compliment the "Daddy" stories she had told them over the years.

Hermione knew. She knew deep down she was meant to be with him and he was meant to be with her. But things were complicated. While there was a good chance she might get transferred to Europe, it was by no means guaranteed. Even if she was, her children would have to leave their friends. And what about her Mum and Sis? Could she move so far away from them? Would they move too? Still, these were details. She knew if - no when he asked her - she knew what she was going to do. She knew, Harry knew, and her mother knew.

WEDNESDAY - JUNE 21, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

It was late and Hermione lay in Harry's arms again, her head resting on his chest in what had become for her a most relaxing sleeping position. She was tired, for it had been a long day followed by a rather physical and incredibly enjoyable evening. They had put the lights out and said good night to each other about an hour ago according to the clock. But, as tired as she was, she had not fallen asleep. Her mind was racing. Harry was all she could think about - more exactly what was their future? Did they have one at all?

She could tell Harry was still awake as well. She had learned to tell the differences in his muscle tone, heart rate and breathing. She knew something was keeping him awake and wondered what it was. Curiosity got the better of her.

"Harry?" She whispered very softly on the off chance she was wrong and he was really asleep.

"Yes?" He whispered back.

"You still awake?"

Harry chuckled. "Obviously," he drawled in an imitation of a long dead professor they both knew and did not know at all.

"Why?"

"Thinking."

"About what?"

"Us."

"Me too. Harry?"

"Yes Angel?"

"I'm scared."

"Of what, Love?"

"Is this real? I mean, is this real or just a fling or something?"

"For me?"

"Yes."

"Real. Definitely."

"How do you know?"

"Cause I was thinking earlier of the end of this week, when we each have to leave and go home..."

"And?"

"I know how much it will hurt me to leave you again, even if I know it's only for a little while."

"Me too. Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"What's going to happen?"

"I don't honestly know, Angel. I'd like to believe that we are on the verge of the rest of our lives - the lives we should have had but were denied because we were afraid to face it."

"What do you mean?"

"It's different this time, isn't it?"

He felt Hermione nod her head against his chest.

"Last time we felt, but we did not say. I kept waiting for you to tell me you loved me as more than a friend, Hermione. Kept waiting for you to ask me if I loved you that way too. I was afraid to tell you how I felt for fear that you did not feel the same way. This time, I told you. I told you, you told me and I am not afraid of how I feel about you then or now. If only..."

"If only?"

"I had said that years before."

"I would have come back."

"As I said."

"It's different now, though."

"Is it? I want us to work. Not just for this week or this summer - forever. If I have to quit my job and move to St. Louis..."

"I can't ask that of you Harry."

"If it is the only way, you won't have to. I want you in my life more than any damn job!"

"Harry..."

"I want you from now on, from this day forward, forever. I love you, Hermione!"

"I love you too, Harry," she said with a hitch in her voice. Harry could soon feel the wetness of her tears on his chest.

"I never want to lose you again. I need you in my life, Angel."

"I don't want to lose you again either. But how are we going to prevent that?"

"Only one way I can think of, Angel."

"Harry..."

"I want to marry you."

"A-are you proposing?"

"Just saying. I will propose, Hermione. That I can promise you. But not now, not here."

"Why not?"

"Because - did I ever tell you about how I proposed to Ginny?"

"No. She never really said either."

"It was something like this. We'd just made love, I was holding her and I proposed. You know how that worked out! No. You deserve better. You deserve romance, a special moment. A moment you can tell your Mum about and our children - this wouldn't count. You deserve a ring and a time that you can never be embarrassed about sharing with anyone and one which can never be forgotten or truly duplicated. But yes, I will propose to you. Probably before the year is out, maybe even sooner than that. I want you in my life, if you want me."

"I do, Harry."

"And..."

"Is this and 'and' or a 'but,' Harry?"

"An 'and.' And, I need to talk to Teddy first."

"Why?"

"Because he's my son. Because I think he should know in advance that I am going to propose to his new Mum. It's been only the two of us for so long and his last 'Mum' experience was not a good one. He needs to know, Hermione."

"What if he doesn't want this?"

"Not going to change what I feel about you and that I want to be your husband. I just would like to know what I need to do as his father to help him adjust. Hopefully, not much."

"But, you will ask me?"

"I will."

"In person?"

"Of course, silly!"

"What if I say no?"

"Will you if I did?"

"No, but what if?"

"I'd be heartbroken and consider entering the priesthood."

"You're joking!"

"About what?"

"The priesthood?"

"Been celibate for seven years before this week. Don't see an issue with that. The 'saving people' thing is still there - except it's saving souls and not necessarily physical lives. Same calling, different rules and methods is all."

"You're serious?"

"About what?"

"The Cloth?"

"No. Not really. But losing you and I can kiss my one chance at a happy family life goodbye. So..."

"Harry..."

"There have only been a few people in my life who saw past the 'Boy-Who Lived' crap. Hagrid did - but I wouldn't marry him. Remus did, but ditto. Severus did, but no way there either. Neville did, again, I am not into guys. McGonagall did, but I am most definitely not interested in a romantic liaison with her. Luna did, but we are just friends. Malfoy did - mostly out of spite at first, still, he's a bloke

"You are the only one you did and you was there for me all the time - even when I did not want you to be. Damn! I know I owe you my life more times over and I never asked anything in return. I know now your love was always there and had nothing to do with any bloody scar or Dark Lord. You loved and love Harry Potter - the boy who never wanted his name in the papers and just wanted a normal life and you did not love nor want to know Harry Potter - the Boy Who Lived.

"And here's the real kicker! You are the only person for whom it was the same for me. Hermione, I know you almost as well as I know myself, assuming I know myself at all, of course. It's always been that way. Without you, it's as if I'm only half here. Another half, the important one, that half is missing. I have missed you more than I could have imagined. I never want to miss you again, Hermione. Never!

"Worse still..."

"Worse?"

"I've only been with two women in my life. The other one was a nightmare. It never felt right with her. With you, my God! I know it has nothing to do with the physics of romance. Without the emotional component, you're just getting shagged. With it, it's making love. Big difference. I shagged Ginny or she shagged me. With her it was always a Quidditch match - a competition. I think we share something special, Hermione. We share, we don't take or demand. That's different and hard to find, I think. I mean, damn woman! Just kissing you is amazing!

"Then there's the final thing."

"There's more?"

"When I sleep with you like this, I don't get the nightmares. It's only when I sleep with you. Those nights we spent together years ago and these last few nights are the only times I don't dream of a field full of dead bodies and being the only person left alive on earth. My dreams with you are about life, love and family; not death, destruction and loneliness. Hermione?"

"Hmmm?"

"Life without you is merely existence and I am tired of just existing."

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"I love you too. You ask, I'll say 'yes' because I feel the same way."

"People say we've always been on the same page."

"Pity we didn't listen. Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"While we are on the topic, there are two other things we need to discuss."

"What?"

"First, there's Mum and Daphne. Before this trip my Boss told me that if this was a big success they would be opening an office and maybe even a plant somewhere in Europe. They are leaning towards London because a fair few of the people to staff the facility will be coming from the States and Britain is currently the only country in Europe with Magical Primary Education and an available Secondary Education similar to what magical children receive here. But there are other options: Bussels, Paris, Milan, Rome...

"Anyway, I am one of the people they are thinking for a European Office, if it opens. I spoke with Mum and she agreed that I should take the job if offered. It's a huge opportunity. I was reluctant because - well, Mum and I are really close and I like our current arrangement as Housemates. She said she would have no problem moving back with me, provided it's under similar circumstances."

"What are you asking?"

"That if we marry, Mum and Daphne can live with us."

"No problem."

"That easy?"

"Over the past few days I have seen how important you all are to each other. Even if they lived next door, it would seem like breaking up a family. Besides, I like your Mum and Sis and there's plenty of room at my London home - six bedrooms. The Manor is much larger still."

"It's no bother?"

"None."

"Thanks Harry."

"You're welcome."

"Next there's children," Hermione said.

"You should talk to your kids and Daphne about us."

"I know and I will but that's not what I meant."

"You meant more, right?"

"Mm-hmmm."

"Are you saying you want more or are you asking if I want more?"
Harry asked.

"Both."

"I was thinking about that earlier, too."

"And?"

"At least a couple more would be great."

"Why not only one more?" Hermione asked.

"Is that all you want?" Harry asked with a slight sound of disappointment in his voice.

"No, just asking why at least a couple?"

"Let's assume we got started on kids right now..."

"Let's not!" Hermione gasped.

"For the sake of discussing my reasoning only?"

"Okay."

"Well, if we got started right now, the little tyke would be seven years younger than Harry and Luna, right?" Harry commented.

"Right."

"Daphne and Teddy would be heading off to Hogwarts when the kid is two, Harry and Luna when its four. It would be, for all intents and purposes an only child and I don't wish for that. By the time he or she is old enough for Hogwarts, the older four will have already finished and moved on."

"I see. Would having twins count as two?" Hermione asked.

"It would, but I am not placing any upper limit on the Potter Family yet."

"Why not?"

"Because you may want more than just two, maybe?"

"Maybe."

"Or it may be two and through, right?"

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"Because I'm not the one whose going to be pregnant. I'm not the one who has to actually live through that. I can only experience it vicariously. I am also not the one who will have to give birth at some point. How many pregnancies is your call, not mine. Why no upper limit? Because money is not an issue. Space might become one in London, but it's not one at the Manor. If we get to big to live at Grimmauld Place long term, we could turn it into a weekend place for when the family needs to go to London."

"You really have been giving it some thought," Hermione said.

"I have. I really want this, Love!"

"At least two then, Harry."

"Thanks."

"More if it's twins."

"Your call on more, Love."

"I glad we had this chat."

"Me too."

"Mrs. Janie Potter," she sighed.

"Love you, Angel!"

"Love you to, Darling!"

And within seconds, they both fell into a most restful sleep.

SATURDAY - JUNE 24, 2006 - NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

"Harry?" Rose asked.

"Yes, Rose?"

"Would you be a dear and take the kids down to the pool? I want to have a chat with my daughter."

"Which one?" Daphne, who was already in her bathing suit, asked.

"The big one with the goofy smile on her face, Love," Rose replied.

"Good! I'm not in trouble."

"Yet," Rose chuckled. "Now away with you!"

Harry led the three children out of the room. Once the door closed, Rose turned to her daughter.

"Interesting week, isn't it?" She said.

Hermione knew where this conversation was going and what it was about and was hoping to avoid it until after they had returned home. She tried to change the topic.

"Brilliant! My Boss is going to be SO pleased! If even half of the proposals are accepted, we'll just have to open a European Office!"

"That's not what I am asking about and you know it!"

"Sorry."

"You've been sleeping with him, Janie."

"What," she replied hoping to look innocent.

"Don't try and deny it, you've had that goofy, besotted look on your face practically since Sunday last. You're sleeping with him, aren't you?"

Hermione nodded.

"Well, you're twenty-six. I really can't tell you what you should and should not do, especially because it's not like the children could walk in on you two. But, do you think it wise?"

"What do you mean, Mother?" Hermione asked suspiciously.

"Look, I like Harry. I really do. He seems to - well, you look happier than I've seen you in goodness knows how long. And the kids love him. But is this for real? Is this something long term, or is this a summer fling?"

"Mother, I would never have slept with him if I did not think there's more to this than a moment's passion. I love him! I really do!"

"But, does he love you?"

Hermione nodded.

"How do you know?"

"Aside from how he behaves around me, you mean?"

Rose Granger nodded.

"We want to get married, Mum."

"He's already proposed?"

"No. Well, not officially. But he has told me he wants to marry be and I have told him I want to marry him and..."

"So you are engaged?"

"No. Not yet. Soon. He needs to talk to Teddy. I need to talk to you and the kids."

"You don't need our blessing, but..."

"I know, but I want it. I want this to work, Mum. I really do."

"I see. He seems like he'd make a great father to the kids."

"I think so."

"What about me and your sister? Where do we fit into this life plan of yours?"

"I'm not going to ask you to move and uproot your life."

"Janie, it is my life, but what do you want?"

"I really don't want to live in London while you two live here, Mum. Ten years ago, maybe. When I was younger you and I did not get along all that well."

Rose snorted. "That's an understatement."

"But, when all this happened, I don't know."

"What?"

"I was terrified when I found out I was pregnant with Harry and Luna. I was afraid that I had ruined my life. I was even more afraid of having to tell you. I knew you would be very disappointed in me, Mum. I was afraid you would hate me. But you were so amazing about it. I never would have gotten through this without you and I've come to see us as a team and I don't want to lose that - ever."

"I won't lie to you, child," Rose replied. "I was a little disappointed when you told me. But I was in no position to hate you, now was I? I was a widow with a young child. You were about to become a single Mum. I needed you too, love. Still, you were nineteen when you got pregnant, twenty when they were born. You had no job. You only had a Secondary School Education - and one that did not mean much in America. Your prospects on your own were - well - bleak. You're my daughter! I could not cast you aside and let you founder.

"I know our relationship wasn't the greatest years ago. You were always Daddy's Little Girl and honestly there were times when I felt like a third wheel..."

"I've always loved you, Mum..."

"I know. I know. And when you told me you were pregnant, yes I admit I was a little disappointed for a moment."

"A moment? Only a moment?"

"Only a moment. Janie, you were nineteen, an adult. Had you been three years younger, I would have been very disappointed. I was hardly a virgin before my wedding night, so I can't fault you on that. You were not and have never been promiscuous. You loved the man who ... Well, had it been little more than a loveless one nighter, I would have been very disappointed. You did not get pregnant to trap him or just because you wanted to play mummy. Had you gotten pregnant on purpose under those circumstances, I would have been very disappointed. You chose to sleep with him. Had he pressured you or had you slept with him out of curiosity or spite, I would have been very disappointed. You'd been on birth control for ages - admittedly not because you were sexually active. Harry was your first. Had you not been using birth control, I would have been very disappointed. But, we both know, these things happen. Birth control is not fool proof. You did not want to get pregnant. Had you wanted this, I would have been disappointed. This was an accident - plain and simple. You had your romance for all the right reasons, you took all the proper precautions - aside from not having sex at all - and despite everything, there you were.

"I was not disappointed for what you had done. I was disappointed for what had happened. You're a mother. Would you be happy if Luna were in your shoes?"

"No, but..."

"Ah! The 'but!' You're a mother, you know what the but is."

"She's my baby!"

"Exactly. When you told me, I did not see a nineteen year old unwed mother to be with no prospects. I saw my little girl, scared, worried and lonely. I was her Mum. I had to help her make things better. And then, the most amazing thing happened!"

"What?"

"If you had taken the easy ways out, I would have been very disappointed. But you did not. You did not get an abortion or put them up for adoption. You did not put off any chance of education. You did not become a burden to me. You did not run out to find a husband. I've seen women do that. You did not.

"You picked the hard road. You chose to keep the children. You went right back to school. Your water broke in class, of all places. You finished Secondary School with top scores on your college entrance exams. You finished two degrees in three years, where most students take five just for one. You did this while raising twins. You then got a decent job and are moving up the ladder fast. You did all that, and yet I see your number one priority is being a mother. And, as exceptional as you are at education and in your career, your even better as a Mum. Your children come first. I see it and they see it too.

"I always saw you as bright and independent, Janie. What I've learned these past seven years is what a truly remarkable woman you have become. Getting pregnant was an accident. But, as time has shown, it was no mistake. Having Harry and Luna made you the woman you are today, and that woman is no mistake. I am not and can never be disappointed in you, Janie. I admire you so much," Rose's voice hitched. "Raising a child is not easy, but you make it look easy. I am proud of you and all you have done. Now, if you were to ask me to go through all that again, I would do it gladly. I love you, Janie!"

"Thanks Mum. Love you too."

"If I seemed like I was coming down on you earlier, it's just that I don't want to see you get hurt. No mother wants that for their child. And, as I have learned, you will always be my daughter and I will never stop being your Mum. I will always worry about you, just as you will always worry about Harry and Luna."

"I never wanted to be a burden to you, Mum."

"You never have been, Janie. Never! You have been a constant joy and I thank God every day for giving me and your Daddy such a wonderful daughter - even if she isn't perfect all the time."

After a long pause, Hermione finally spoke again. Mum?"

"Yes Dear?"

"A few nights ago? When Harry and I told each other we wanted to get married?"

"Mm-hmm?"

"I told him I would be willing to move to London, if that's what it takes. But, I also told him I could not do that and leave you and Daphne."

"And what did he say?"

"Essentially, he understands we are a package deal."

"Really?"

Hermione nodded. "He says he has more than enough room in his London house for all of us. And that's the small place."

Rose smiled. "Have you also discussed children?"

"As in more?"

Rose nodded.

"Not in great detail, just generally."

"And?"

"At least two more pregnancies."

"At least?"

"Well, we agreed on a minimum of two more kids, Mum. Seeing as I had twins last time, well chances are better than average I could have them again. As it is, if we only have one more, it would be as if that child was an only child. We both were and we don't want that. Harry pointed out that even if we got started now - and we're not - our next child will be four when all the others head off to school. When that child is eleven, the older brothers and sisters - counting Daphne as one - will all be off at university. We both think our next child should have at least one younger sibling."

"And at the most?"

"Harry says that's up to me."

"Really?"

"He doesn't have to get pregnant and give birth to them."

Rose laughed. "No! No he does not. Janie?"

"Yes Mum?"

"I hope you two do get married."

"Thank you, Mummy." Hermione was now crying.

SUNDAY - JUNE, 25, 2006 - SOUTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT 1327 NEW YORK TO ST. LOUIS SOMEWHERE OVER OHIO

The children had cried when they realized their Daddy was going away again. She was crushed by that and could not think of any way to make it better. She finally calmed down when she told them she was going to take them to see their Daddy in about a month. Still, even for her, a month seemed like an eternity.

She told them they would go to London and then to Harry's Manor House and, if they were good, maybe even Hogwarts, the place

where most of the "Daddy" stories actually happened. She then said that their Daddy and Teddy would come back with them to America.

"Forever?" Little Harry asked.

"Maybe one day, Sweetie. But just for the summer now. We are going to show him where you live and go to a baseball game and then all of us are going to Disney World together."

"What about after, Mommy?" Luna asked.

She told her daughter that was for later. Now, as she looked at her daughter, she wondered. What about later, really? Hermione knew what she wanted. She wanted the same thing she had when she boarded that flight to Australia and left Harry behind. She knew now he loved her. But even back then, she wanted more than that. She wanted him in her life forever. She wanted to be his wife and to be the mother of his children. She was the latter, by accident, she now wanted the complete package.

Harry was much better at talking to her than he ever had been before. She had no doubts about how he felt - he told her every night and every morning. Still, he had not asked her to marry him. It was obvious to Hermione he was thinking about it. But a part of her feared he might balk at actually doing it. His last marriage was a disaster and she sensed there was still some baggage left over from that nightmare. She hoped and prayed he could see that things would be different with her.

Before they parted, she gave Harry all of the letters she had written to him over the years. While she had stopped mailing him years ago, she continued to write. She hoped that when he read them all he would know that things would be much different with her. Harry had given her all his letters as well. Hermione vowed to read them all between now and the trip to see Harry. She might even read some of them to the children.

He bloody well better propose to me, she thought. She decided that if he did not, she would propose to him. She saw a wonderful life ahead and did not want to wait another seven days, much less seven years, to begin to live it. She did not know that there was a bump in the road to her dream life.

SUNDAY - JUNE 25, 2006 - 32 HIGH STREET, HOGSMEADE, SCOTLAND

Harry arrived at his Cousin Dudley's house at around six that evening. When his flight had arrived in London and after he had cleared customs, he returned briefly to his London home to drop off his bags and car and then head off to Scotland to retrieve Teddy. Although he was certain Teddy had a wonderful time his first week of the summer Holidays, he always hated leaving him. Harry had traveled to Hogsmeade by Floo, a magical transit system run by the government that connected one magical location to another. A pinch of magical powder and you could travel anywhere on the system, provided your destination was open to arrivals - private residences could shut themselves down, of course. Harry had traveled to the Pub, the Three Brooksticks. It was only a short walk from there to the Dursley home.

Harry rang the doorbell. The door soon opened and a thin, middle aged, blonde haired woman with deep blue eyes opened the door. It took her a second to recognize him, but her severe expression softened when she did.

"Harry," she said, "welcome back!" She pulled Harry into a hug.

"Thanks, Aunt Tuny," he said.

She smiled at him and continued, "So how was your trip?"

"Long, but interesting. Where's Teddy?"

"He's out back with the others playing. Dinner's in about an hour. You staying?"

Harry smelled the meal cooking. "Is there enough? It smells wonderful!"

"Beef stew, nothing fancy."

"Your's?"

"Of course," Petunia Dursley smiled.

"I'm still waiting for you to tell me the secret. If there's enough, you bet I'm staying for dinner!"

"What am I thinking?" Aunt Petunia said. "Come in Harry."

"Thank you."

"Tell you what, Harry," Petunia said, "you tell me your bar-be-que secrets and I'll tell you mine." She knew Harry would never do that.

"I guess I'll just have to keep trying," Harry moped. "It's good to see you again, Aunt Tuny."

"You really do look well, Harry. New York must suit you."

"I had a decent time," Harry said. "Are Dudley and Jena..."

"Harry," a man's voice boomed. "Love, Harry's here!" A large blonde man practically ran forward and pulled Harry into a hug.

Harry laughed. "Guess that answers my question," he said. "Good to see you, Big-D!"

"How was New York," Dudley asked?

"Still there," Harry said. He then saw another blonde woman emerging. "Jena, good to see you too."

"Welcome home, Harry," Jena Dursley said.

"Teddy giving you any trouble?" Harry asked.

"No more than usual," Dudley replied. "They're out back playing. Should I call him in?"

"No, Dud. Your Mum invited me to stay for her beef stew so I ..."

"Can't resist," Dudley laughed. "Not sure anyone can, really."

"Can I talk to you?" Harry asked his family.

"Harry," Petunia asked in genuine concern, "is something wrong?"

"No," Harry said. "Nothing's wrong. Quite the opposite in fact."

The adults had moved into the living room and were now seated on the sofa, while Harry sat in a chair. "I met someone in New York," Harry said.

"By that you mean some bird," Dudley began, but stopped when he saw Harry's expression.

"A woman, yes," Harry said once he regained his composure. Dudley had not meant to be insulting. Harry knew his social life, or lack thereof, was a topic of discussion amongst all his friends and his family. They were polite, but he knew they all felt sorry for him in a way. They had moved on past the War and were starting families or rebuilding ones torn apart by the War. Harry had been stuck in limbo. Pining for a girl he loved who had left him, he married another and was stuck in a loveless marriage for years. When he finally ended it, he dated. But it was nothing but a chain of groupies who wanted him for his fame and not for who he really was. They were all basically carbon copies of his ex.

"So, out with it," Dudley said eagerly.

"Her name's Janie and she lives in St. Louis in the United States. We met at breakfast my first morning in New York and ... hit it off. I'm thinking of asking her to marry me."

"Bit quick, don't you think?" Petunia said cautiously. "Love at first sight doesn't always work. I should know."

"Oh, I don't know," Harry began. He was intentionally beating around the bush.

"Harry, I just don't want you to rush into anything. I thought you rushed in to engagement the last time and we all know how that turned out."

"This time's different."

"How so?"

"Because, it's not like I only just met her. I met her years and years ago. I've been in love with her for years."

"Bloody hell," Dudley exclaimed. "You're talking about Hermione Granger, aren't you?" The two woman gasped.

Harry nodded. He had told Dudley about her years ago, not long after he moved back from the states and had yet another in a seemingly endless string of horrible dates. Harry had gotten a little drunk that night and told Dudley of the love of his life and how he lost her.

"How? I mean, nobody knew where she was or even if she was alive."

"She was at the conference for her company in St. Louis," Harry said. "I saw her sitting alone at breakfast and as all the other tables were full decided to join her. I didn't know for certain if it was her, not until I saw her eyes."

"And? Still carrying the torch for her?"

Harry nodded. "And it seems she's been doing the same for me."

"Then why'd she disappear? Why no letters?"

"Someone knicked her letters. I never got one after her first one, but she sent them all the same for years. She finally stopped sending them thinking I wanted nothing to do with her. Nothing was further from the truth."

"Who would do such a thing?" Jena asked.

"His ex," Dudley replied. "She's a right mean bitch."

Harry nodded. "It gets both better and worse."

"How so?"

"Janie, as she's now called, gave birth to twins in March of 2000. Our twins!"

"Bloody hell!"

"She wrote to me about them all the time. I never got those letters. I never learned I was a Dad or about my children. If I had received the letter she wrote at the end of August '99, the one where she told me how she really felt about me and told me she was pregnant, things may have been very different. Instead, I thought she hated me and she thought I hated her.

"We were wrong. Moreover, we now know we are still in love and I have two children. Two wonderful children - I missed six year's of their lives because of the Wicked Witch!"

"You think she knew?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm certain she just binned the letters unopened. She would have ripped my head off if she had known."

"Bitch," Dudley nodded.

"So," Jena asked, "are you going to get to meet your children?"

"Already have," Harry smiled. "Their gran brought them to New York as a surprise for Hermione. I just had a most wonderful week getting to know her again and getting to know little Harry and Luna: it's a boy and a girl. They are wonderful!"

"She had no idea you were coming?" Petunia asked suspiciously.

"How could she? I was only tapped to go the Thursday before. Parker's name was still on the official registry when the conference began. It was a fortuitous coincidence, Aunt Tuney, nothing more - and certainly nothing less. You want to see a picture of them?"

"I'd - I'd love to," she replied feeling guilty about accusing someone she did not even know and someone it was clear Harry cared for of intrigue.

Harry handed them a normal (non-moving and un-magical) photo of Hermione, little Harry, Luna and himself. It was one of several taken at the Yankees game in New York.

"Is this her?" Petunia asked. "Is this woman Hermione?"

Harry nodded.

Dudley whistled. "She's a looker, Sparks."

"She really is pretty," Jena agreed.

"Yeah," Harry said quietly. "I think so too."

"Your children look adorable," Petunia added.

"Thanks," Harry replied. "That was a fun day," he added more to himself than anyone in the room.

"When are you going to ask her?" Jena asked. "I mean assuming that you do, of course."

"She's bring the family over for the picnic," Harry replied. "The dates are not set for their visit, but I plan to ask her then."

"You think she'll say yes?"

"She said she would."

"I'm happy for you, Harry," Petunia said.

"Me too," Jena added.

"You deserve it," Dudley added.

"Thanks," Harry replied. "Oh. Could you all do me and her a huge favor for now?"

"What's that, Sparks?" Dudley asked.

"Keep this kind of quiet for now?"

"Why? You aren't embarrassed by this, are you?"

"No. I'm really happy about it. But I don't want it getting out that Hermione is returning or that we are thinking of getting married or that we had those two lovely children out of wedlock."

"Harry," Petunia said, "it's going to get out sooner or later."

"I know. I'd rather it get out on my terms. I'd rather Hermione and my kids be spared the inevitable media circus as long as possible - at least until the picnic. You can tell anyone you want that I met a wonderful woman in New York named Janie and I am significantly serious about her that I am 'off the market' for now. You can even say she should be at the picnic, but no more. Please?"

"No problem, Sparks," Dudley said. "Isn't that right, Mum?"

Petunia looked as if she was going to disagree for a few moments before she finally shrugged. "I guess that's better then telling me to keep quiet altogether," she said with more than a hint of disappointment.

Harry shook his head. While his Aunt had changed so much and so much for the better since he was a boy, she retained two annoying habits. She was infuriatingly nosey and an incurable gossip.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SUNDAY - 25 JUNE 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY, CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

"Has everybody finished?" Hermione asked looking at her two children and sister at the dinner table.

"Yeah," she said.

"T.V.?" Harry asked.

"Not yet," Hermione replied.

"BUT MOM? The Cardinal games is on!"

"Family meeting in the living room," Hermione said sternly. "NOW!"

The three kids wondered what was wrong. A family meeting usually meant one of them broke a rule that applied to all of the children. Rose and Hermione each had rules for their own kids, such as bedtimes and what they could and could not do. For those rules, their own Mum was the only one who could enforce the rules although all three knew that their Gran or Sissy were not above telling the rule enforcer that a Janie or Nana Rule had been broken by their child. But there were also agreed upon rules that all three children had to obey. These were usually serious ones, like no lying to an adult and such. These rules either grownup could enforce and almost always were preceded by a "family meeting." Of course, not all "family meetings" meant someone had done something wrong.

Hermione and her mother took their usual "family meeting" seat on the couch and the three children sat on the floor, each of them with a concerned look on their face.

"What'd we do wrong?" Luna asked apprehensively.

"Why do you ask?" Hermione said.

"You're not smiling. When you're not smiling it's usually because you are not happy about something."

Hermione relaxed a little and smiled. "I'm not angry," she said. "But I need to talk to you about something important."

"More important than the Cardinals?" Little Harry asked.

Hermione nodded.

"And we're not in trouble?" Luna added.

"No, Sweetie, you're not."

"So why?" Little Harry asked.

"We're having this meeting to talk about Daddy and England, Sweetie," Hermione replied. "You know that Nana Rose and I are from there, right?"

Little Harry nodded.

"And Daddy lives there, right?"

Little Harry nodded.

"Do you know where England is?"

"I do," Daphne said excitedly.

"Sis, the question's for Harry," Hermione went on.

"Daddy told me it was across an ocean."

"It is," Hermione agreed. "It is a large group of islands on the far side of the ocean we saw when we were in New York."

"How big an ocean?"

You remember how long it took us to fly from here to New York?"

Little Harry nodded.

"Well, to fly from New York to London - where Daddy lives - takes that long, and that long again, and that long again, and maybe a little longer, almost all of it over that ocean."

"And there's no land in between?"

"No land."

"Oh. What happens if something is wrong with the plane?"

"Hopefully, you're close enough to land to make it to an airport," Hermione replied. She never liked hiding things from her kids. Certain topics were just not talked about - adult questions, she called them. But otherwise, she was up front with them.

"And if you're not?"

"Hopefully you can land in the water."

"Does that happen?"

"It has," Hermione nodded. "Most often the plane makes it to an airport."

"Oh."

"But when we go to England to see your Daddy, we won't be flying in an airplane."

"We won't?" Little Harry and Rose Granger asked.

"A boat then?" Daphne asked.

"International Magical Portal," Hermione replied. "We go to the airport just as if we were going to fly there. There's a room there for magical travel. In the room there is a doorway and at the right time, the doorway opens and we walk through. When we all walk through, we will be in a similar room in Heathrow Airport just outside London."

"You mean we get there instantly?" Daphne asked.

Hermione nodded. "I'm told so. Never traveled by portal before myself. I'm told it's just like waking through a door. Nothing to it."

"Why haven't you used it before?" Rose asked. "I mean hours on a plane!"

"It's relatively new - ah - technology, for lack of a better word. My company developed the prototype system in the mid-1990's. It's difficult to set up as spells must be cast at each potential destination at exactly the same time. That requires careful coordination.

"Anyway, while it works, it has only been recently approved for commercial transport."

"Why?" Rose asked.

"Security concerns," Hermione replied. "It could have begun going online around 1997, but the U.S. Magical Government put it on hold. They were concerned it would be used by Death Eaters either to spread that war overseas or to flee capture. It was set to start operating in 2001, but the attacks on New York and Washington delayed it some more. Again, security concerns."

"So why did you fly to New York if this system is operating. I assume it's available in New York."

"Right now it is limited to international travel. This is due to the limited number of portals. That will change in time as more portals come on line. The portals can only handle so many 'passengers' for so many destinations. That too may change as the magical technology evolves."

"It works though?"

"Oh yes, most certainly. It's just not as flexible as flying is right now."

"What about me?" Rose asked. "You lot are magical and I'm not. How can I possibly use this portal thing?"

"Anyone can, Mum," Hermione replied. "You need a lot of magical skill to establish the portal and skill to activate it, but none to use it. All you need is a magical sponsor to use it - me."

"Oh. Well, I could do without another long flight."

"Thanks."

"This isn't about our trip to England," Daphne observed.

"No, Sis, it's not," Hermione replied.

"Then what's it about?"

Hermione sighed. "Kids, we are probably moving to England sometime between now and January."

"Daddy?" Luna asked.

"You're getting married?" Daphne added.

"He hasn't proposed - yet," Hermione replied. "He's says he's going to. And I've told him that he'd better because I want to say 'yes.' But that's not the reason."

"What's the reason, Mommy?" Little Harry asked.

"My job, Sweetie."

"Your job?"

Hermione nodded. "You know I was working while you were out with Nana and the Weasleys last week, right?"

Harry nodded.

"You know I was there to sell things for my company, right?"

He nodded again. "Did you?"

"A lot of things, Sweetie. More than I or my boss thought was possible. And, I was selling our things to England and France and other countries across the ocean."

"And that's why we're moving to see Daddy?" Luna asked.

"That's why we may be moving to England, Sweetie," Hermione replied. "I sold so much that my company may need to open an office across the ocean to handle those sales and others. My boss already told me there was a high degree of probability that I would be sent over there to help run it. The office will be in London..."

"Where Daddy lives?" Little Harry asked.

Hermione nodded. She then heard a sniff and looked at her younger sister. Daphne was crying. "Daphne?" She asked.

"Y-you're leaving us, Sissy?" Daphne cried. "Y-you're leaving Mommy and me? You're leaving and - and we'll n-never see you again? Y-you're taking H-Harry a-and L-Luna away? I - I thought w-we were a family! You may be m-my Sissy, b-but y-you're also my Mom - my other Mom! H-Harry and Luna may be m-my niece and n-nephew, b-but they're also my brother and sister. You can't leave! You can't!"

"Daphne," Hermione said in a soft yet stern voice, "look at me!" Daphne complied looking at her older sister. Hermione had a smile on her face, even if her voice just then was not smiling. "I will never leave you or Mum. We will never leave you, not like this. We are a family, understand?"

"So - so Mommy and I are..."

"We're a family," Hermione continued. "If I have to move to England, we all do, got it?"

"But But what about school, Sissy? You told us that when you were a little girl you didn't get to learn magic at all until you were eleven - almost twelve! You couldn't even have a wand! Not when you were eight! Even then, you couldn't do magic at home at all!"

"It's different now, Daphne. There's a school in London that is not unlike the school you got to here. You start magic at six and get your wand at eight there just like here."

"And they teach things other than magic?"

"Just like here, Sis."

"And what about our friends? We have to leave them, too!"

"Some, for certain," Hermione said. "Some, however - well, some will be moving to London as well."

"Who?"

"Don't know yet, Sis. But if the new office opens, and especially if a new plant opens, fair bet some of your friends will be moving over with their families as well."

"And what if they don't?"

"I made my best friends after moving, Love. Friends are - well - if you look, you will find them even if you never knew them before. You'll be okay, Sis."

"What about baseball," Little Harry asked?

"They play some there, Love. Not professionally - so far as I know - but there are other Americans at the school and they play. A fair few Brits as well, Love. Remember Gabbie? She's a Brit and she plays."

"It won't be the same," Little Harry grumped.

"No Sweetie, it won't," Hermione admitted. "But, it is a new adventure and that is always worth something."

"I guess..."

"So, are you all ready?"

"I suppose."

"Will we see castles and dragons and such," Luna asked?

"Yes Sweetie," Hermione replied.

"Count me in then!"

"So long as we're family forever," Daphne added.

"We are and always will be, Sis," Hermione replied.

"Then I guess..."

MONDAY - JUNE 26, 2006 - MAJOR CRIMES AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS DIVISION, ROYAL NATIONAL MAGICAL POLICE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry sat down at his computer and checked into his e-mail accounts. It had taken him nearly an hour to read through the hundred or so e-mails on his office account - most of which were typical interoffice memos that had been dealt with during his absence. Several he had already answered from his own laptop while in New York. There were only a handful of new ones that garnered his attention, all from this morning. His boss wanted to see the results of his trip as soon as possible (ASAP) as did the finance and accounting folks. Fortunately, he had already finished his report and had it on a flash drive which he promptly forwarded to his superiors. There were also several e-mails regarding ongoing investigations that required either his attention or response. Between the e-mail and the stack of papers on his desk, it was going to be a long day. Much as part of him liked to get away from the office, he hated the pile that always seemed to greet him on his return.

He had already decided to bring his own lunch so he could work through. As he ate his sandwich, he decided to access his personal account, something he had been too tired to do the night before. There were not a lot of messages as most of his usual writers had known he would be away for a week. There was the usual invitation to Tea at the elder Weasleys, which he had missed while he was away. Not that it mattered. He knew his former mother-in-law would have invited Ginny if she were available in yet another of her seemingly endless efforts to get them reunited, as if that was ever going to happen.

Draco had written to remind him that some of the Thirty would be getting together for lunch on Wednesday and to remind him that he had agreed to have lunch with Draco and his wife the next day. Harry wrote back to say he could attend.

There was another E-mail from Tony Masterson, an American working in Britain who was the coach of Teddy's Junior League Baseball Team reminding Harry of the game between the Kensington Dragons and the Diagon Alley Tigers this coming Saturday.

The next one he would have ordinarily discarded as junk or spam or a potential Trojan Horse as he had never seen the sender's address before. But, he knew who it was from. It was from Hermione.

Harry!

Just put the little ones to bed. It's probably after three in the morning in London and I don't expect you'll see this until tomorrow sometime, but just needed to write to you.

I am finalizing all the paperwork from the trip to New York. I really out did myself! I exceeded my company's sales expectations by a factor of six or more! Not just from the proposal I did for your Ministry, but I also have significant proposals or actual sales to several other European governments and agencies! No doubt about it, my company will probably have to open a European office and maybe even a plant! I should know in the next week or two what they intend to do, but I'd say it's highly probably I will be moving to London sometime this year! I AM SO THRILLED!

Mum and I spoke to the kids about England. I told them that we are probably going to be moving there, in part because of you. They asked if we are getting married and I told them we'd like to. I hope that's okay for you. Anyway, Harry and Luna were excited. They've been talking about our trip to see you almost nonstop and they were thrilled that we might be moving there and that if we do they can see you all the time! Daphne was upset at first. She thought her and Mum were staying here! Perish the thought as Mum has agreed to move with us.

If you can, give some idea of what you plan to do with US when we are there. The kids have picked up my old habit from childhood of trying to learn all they can about any place they are going to visit. I think we should

show them both magical and non-magical places. You know, such as Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, perhaps Hyde Park or Kew Gardens, Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle, Stonehenge perhaps(?), oh, and maybe take them shopping in Diagon Alley? (Daphne needs her first wand and I would love to get it from Ollivanders.) Also, do you think a trip to Hogsmeade and maybe even Hogwarts is possible? After all, that's where we spent so much of our time when we were younger. Just some thoughts.

This past week was SO wonderful! I still can't believe what has happened! I still can't believe how much I love you or that you love

me too! I cannot wait to see you again and hear your voice. I cannot wait to wake up in your arms again (and all the other things leading to that!)

The kids miss you! And I miss you terrible, Darling.

I love you SO much!

Janie.

Harry immediately wrote a reply.

Hermione:

At work. I've already forwarded your proposals to the people who need to make the decisions along with my specific recommendations as to certain of your company's products (most notably the Pensieve Database). Got an e-mail from my head of department not minutes ago who seems - at least initially - very impressed indeed.

I don't know how your first day back is for you, but it always amazes me how things pile up around here - even when it's been a quiet week!

Picked up Teddy from Dudley and Jena's last night and had dinner with them. When I got there, the Dursley kids and Teddy were out playing. Told Dudley and Jena about you. I want to tell everyone, but I also want to spare you the press for as long as possible. They know who you are, of course, because I've talked about you often in the past. They were stunned at how we met again - I was too, quite frankly. Even more stunned that we're seeing each other, although they really are happy for me and us.

Us. Wow! Never thought that before! It really is nice, though.

Anyway, the Dursleys know to call you Janie. Dudders and I have a bet as to how soon the story of the mystery girl from America who has taken Most Eligible Wizard off the market hits the press. Dudley figures next week. I'm betting on Thursday latest. I swear, it seems I go to the loo and it's front page news!

I haven't told Teddy yet. When we finally got home all he wanted to do was play with Willie. (I think I forgot to tell you about her. She's our Old English Sheepdog. She's 3 and we got her 'cause Teddy begged me to death to get a dog. Sometimes I fear I spoil the boy. Then again, having never been spoiled, maybe I am overcompensating or something.) Willie may have missed Teddy more than I did (she was staying with a neighbor of mine.) Teddy faded fast though, so it was bedtime. I really missed him, you know. Guess tonight I'll sit him down and tell him. Hope it goes well.

I miss you, Angel. I miss hearing your voice, your laugh. I miss seeing you smile. I most certainly miss having you in my arms. I miss the smell of you. I do hope your company does open a London office and certainly hope it opens sooner rather than later so I can have My Angel all the time!

I'll think about what to do when you all get here and let you know.

I love you so much.

Harry.

A few hours later, just before he decided to call it a day at work and go home to his son, Harry checked his e-mail again and saw a response from Hermione.

Harry:

"A mystery girl from America?" You make me sound so - so EXOTIC, I guess. Part of me wants to think you see me that way, Harry. Tell me how it turns out with Teddy!

I miss you loads! And I love you even more!

Janie (Exotic beauty of the West!)

Harry replied immediately.

Exotic Beauty of the West:

My fairest Angel! I didn't think to tell you this earlier. As much as the last seven years have pained my heart for not having you in my life, there was one silver lining amongst the dark clouds of emptiness.

Had I seen you every day, I would probably not have noticed not appreciated how you have grown as a woman. The Hermione I said goodbye to was a pretty woman who I loved very much. The Hermione I had breakfast with last Saturday was so beautiful she takes my breath away and I love her more than I think could ever be possible. I never want to lose My Angel again!

I am now so glad that my thought about going back in time to change things never went beyond mere musings. This reality is turning out to be SO pleasant!

I love you and need you in my life, My Arwen!

Harry

Harry wondered whether Hermione would pick up on the literary reference. He knew she was going to scold him about his time travel idea. In fact, he kind of counted on it. It did not take Hermione long to respond.

My Aragon!

I never knew you read the Lord of the Rings! Did you know it has always been one of my favorite books? Daphne is trying to read it now, you know. As for little Harry and Luna, I've read the Hobbit to them and they

have seen the DVD. I'm sure they'll love it too when they're older.

Time travel? You weren't serious about that were you? Do you have any idea how dangerous that could be? I'm just glad you never tried a fool stunt like that!

Sorry. I really should not scold you for something you merely thought about. But I have been so worried about you these past several years! I've missed you SO much. I love you, My Aragon!

Your Arwen

Harry was hardly surprised by Hermione's response.

My Arwen! My Angel!

Of course I have read the Lord of the Rings! How could you think I would miss out on one of the great works of English Literature? Oh, that's right. The me you knew hated to read. Sorry, forgot. Things change.

Yes, I have read it - several times. It is one of my favorite works of literature. Yes, I knew it was one of your favorites, which was why I found the time to read it (after The Hobbit) for the first time they year you went back to school. I was planning to talk to you about it, but it never came up and then you were gone from my life. (Sigh) Not long after you left, I read some of you other favorites and some you never mentioned. I've read Jane

Austin and some of the Bronte Sisters works. Didn't like them that much - too girly I guess. I've read Dickens and do like his works, although they are somewhat depressing at times. Jules Verne is cool as well.

I've also read a collective work of the writings of Mark Twain (his real name was Samuel Clemens). He was an American author who lived a century ago or more. He's most known for Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. But my favorites are The Prince and the Pauper and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. Then there's The Bard. Shakespeare is a must read as well - certainly his better known works are,

although I can't say much about Hamlet. Although, in some ways I could identify with him. Isaac Asimov's Robot and Foundation series is a read I enjoy repeating as well. For pure absurdity, Douglas Adams A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series is worth the time. Enough about reading.

Yes Dear, I did consider time travel. I considered it practically from the moment Sirius died all those years ago. I seriously began considering it again after the War and then after you left and I was stuck in a disaster of a

marriage. So much so that I studied it and its theory and practical and philosophical complications and consequences from both magical and non-magical sources. Having studied it, I can safely rule it out as being anything any sane person should wish to attempt.

(Which means you and I are not quite sane as you did it to attend classes for a whole year and we did it to save Sirius and Buckbeak that same year. If I knew then what I knew now... I would not have been so eager to try it AT ALL!)

The common belief is that if you change something in the past, all time and all existence MUST follow. Not true. To you and me, life exists in four dimensions known as Space-Time. Space-Time is linear, slowing from the past to the present and into the future in a logical progression and affected all along by past events and decisions. Interrupt that logical progression to any degree, and that timeline cannot continue.

But to assume that there is only one possible timeline is folly. The timelines are infinite and as varied as the stars in the universe. For simplicity, it can be stated as follows: Anytime anyone makes any decision, there was the chance that they would have decided differently. The timeline we know is based upon the collective decisions that WERE made. But every conceivable decision has been made and there are timelines that move off in another direction based upon the different decisions. If you change a decision in your own past (collective, not singular) you change the present and the future such that the timeline you knew ends at that point and you cannot go back.

Thus, every time you used your Time Turner, you altered the timeline, creating a mini time paradox. You where in Ancient Runes, and absent from Muggle Studies, then you were in Muggle Studies. The reason all hell did not break lose was that your alteration was only a short time and did not create a full blown paradox. That is why your Professors never caught on. However, what would have happened if you had gone back that hour or two and killed or hurt someone who otherwise would not have suffered? Paradox! The original timeline is now destroyed!

When I learned all about this stuff, I wondered why Dumbledore ever encouraged us to go back two hours or so that day near the end of our Third Year. In the original, unaltered timeline, Buckbeak, Sirius, me and maybe you were destined to die. The events had reached a point of no return such that decisions could no longer alter the outcome. Buckbeak had been executed and the Dementor attack could not be stopped of its own accord without the intervention of a mini-paradox.

After months of pondering, I now know Dumbledore did it because MY death was at issue. Had I died that day like I was supposed to ... well, he knew the Prophecy. Only I could stop Riddle and prevent the world from being cast into darkness. So what is a little paradox amongst friends? After all, it was only two hours - two hours that arguably changed the World as it could have been.

The two hours that created a REAL paradox, however, were not substantially effected by the Butterfly Effect. The farther back in time you go, the more likely your actions will create unintended consequences. Far enough and any action is likely to create an inalterable consequence. I pondered that reality for a long time.

The Butterfly Effect is a concept from Chaos Theory. Conceptually, a butterfly in the Amazon beats its wings and months later as a result it rains in London. Change even the smallest thing in the past, and if it is far enough in the past, the result of such seemingly insignificant change cannot be predicted. You may think you changed something for the better when, in fact, they are infinitely worse! Therein lies the rub.

The first question the Time Meddler will ask is: "What about my present do I wish to change?" For me, it was losing you, my Angel. Everything else I could deal with, but losing you? No! That is what I first wanted to change. Second question was in what way did I wish to keep you? I wanted you back as the best friend I had ever had and ever could have and as the love of my life. But I also wanted you back where I was the same person for you.

My Arwen! My Angel! I did not know that you felt the same about me as I did you! Thus, I focused on a time when I could "help" you fall in love with me and a time when I was already in love with you - the lead up to the Yule Ball our Fourth Year. After all, it was at that time I knew I should be in love with you. I'd have found a way to convince the Then Me to invite you right after it is announced! Perhaps as a letter from Sirius who I would have listened to at the time? Perfect! At least that was what I thought. Damn brain! I soon realized that would have been a potential disaster.

The more I thought about, the more I realized the folly. I would have bent over backwards to keep you safe and alive! That's what you do for the woman you love, even when they want to be there for you! I

would have taken risks to keep you safe that I did not take. I would have died in the end without you and I knew it. You saved my life and I knew the result had I not been saved. It was then, when your importance hit me between the eyes, it was then that I knew changing the past was a fool's errand.

So sanity returned, the past remained unaltered and I accepted the fate dealt to me. It hurt, My Angel. But it was for the best. Then, I saw you and chose to talk to you once again. What happened was for the best, My

Love. As painful as it has been, what we now can have is far better than what we might have had.

To be honest, I was not really ready for you when you left. I was a wreck. I had been unloved for so long - or so I thought. I was not ready at eighteen to be your true love. I am now. Please be mine!

I love you more than life itself!

I love you, My Arwen! My Angel!

Your Aragon - Harry

P.S.: I need to go now. Teddy needs to be picked up and I need to talk to him. I hope it goes well. I love you, My Arwen!

MONDAY - JUNE 26, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

"Sit down, Teddy, we need to talk," Harry began.

"I didn't do it!" Teddy protested.

"Do what?"

"It was Vicky! She's the one!"

"Teddy, I'm not talking about anything that might have happened at 'Aunt' Fleur's today, okay?"

"I suppose."

"Besides, she didn't say anything to me and she would have if she thought you did something you were not supposed to have done, okay?"

"I guess," Teddy replied seeming relieved.

"This is about something that happened when I was away."

"I didn't do it!"

Harry had to laugh. Teddy was definitely the son of his old friends and was always getting into trouble.

"Cousin Dudley said you were very well behaved when you were with him, Teddy," Harry sighed. "This is about something that happened to me when I was away."

"Oh."

"I met someone..."

"You mean like a girl?"

Harry nodded.

"Eeeew! Gross! Did you get all kissy faced and stuff?"

"Whether I did or did not is not important here. I met her and I like her and I just wanted you to know that you'll probably be meeting her in a few weeks."

"You did get all kissy faced, didn't you."

"Maybe," Harry drawled, "but that's not important. What is important is she and her family will be coming here for our picnic and I hope you will like them."

"Why? I mean Dad, you told me most girls only like you 'cause you're rich and famous and you don't like people like that."

"This girl doesn't care about any of that," Harry said.

"How do you know? You said you thought the 'Wicked Witch' like you for you and you were wrong," Harry protested. "How do you know? I don't want another Wicked Witch! I don't," Teddy protested!

"I know because I've actually known her a long, long time, Teddy. She has always known I hate being famous and I really don't care about money and all and she has always respected that about me."

"Like Luna and Fleur and stuff?"

Harry nodded.

Teddy gasped. "It's Hermiony, isn't it?"

"Hermione," Harry corrected, "and yes it is. How'd you guess?"

"'Cause she wasn't met here. You said she left here and never came back and you meet someone you've knew long ago over there. You said she was lost. Where was she?"

"Right now, she lives in St. Louis in the United States."

"Oh. She's not a Cardinals fan, is she?"

Harry nodded.

"Yuck!"

"Teddy, we like people because of who they are, not what teams they like. You like Harry Dursley even though he's a Tornados fan, right?"

Teddy nodded. "Puddlemere!"

"So, I can like her even though she's not a Braves fan."

"I guess."

Harry pulled a picture out. It was taken at the hotel in New York and showed Harry with Hermione. He handed it to Teddy.

"That's her?" Teddy asked.

Harry nodded.

"She's not a 'Wicked Witch'," Teddy stated.

"How can you tell?"

"She has a nice smile," Teddy replied. "The 'Wicked Witch' never smiled, at least not around me. She looks nice."

"I'm glad you approve," Harry chuckled. He then handed his "son" another picture. This one was of Rose and Daphne.

"Who's this?" Teddy asked. "More girlfriends?"

Harry could not help but laugh. "No, not girlfriends. When Hermione comes to visit, she's going to be coming with her family. Remember the story I told you about her? About why she left?"

"She went to find her family in Australia," Teddy nodded.

Harry nodded. "She found them. Her Daddy got sick and died before she did, but she found her Mum and found out she had a baby sister. Rose is her Mum and the little girl is Hermione's little sister Daphne."

"Oh. It's sad her Daddy died."

"Indeed. You have some things in common with Daphne, though."

"Oh? What's that?"

"She's supposedly a good baseball player and really smart. Top of her class."

"Yeah. Big deal! She's still a girl!"

"She was born on April 10th, 1998," Harry added.

"That's my birthday!" Teddy exclaimed.

"There's more."

"Really?"

Harry nodded. "Remember what I told you about Time Zones?"

Teddy nodded.

"You were born here in London at 12:37 in the afternoon. Daphne was born in Perth Australia. Perth is eight hours ahead of us. So if you were born at 12:37 in London, what time was it in Perth?"

Teddy hesitated. "8:37 in the evening?"

"Right," Harry said with a smile. "Daphne here was born at 8:37 in the evening Perth time on April 10th."

"Really? So we're like exactly the same age?"

"Seems so."

"Cool!"

Harry slid another photo over to Teddy. It was of Harry and Luna.

"Who are they?" Teddy asked.

"Those are Hermione's children," Harry said softly. "They are twins and about two years younger than you, Teddy. The boy is named Harry and the girl is Luna."

"So Hermione's divorced like you?" Teddy asked. Harry had not thought it necessary yet to distinguish between divorce and annulment. Teddy understood 'divorce' as he had friends at school who's parents had done that.

"No Teddy. Hermione was never married."

"Then how can she have kids?"

"Grown up question," Harry replied, "but I will tell you marriage is not necessary to having babies."

"Oh. So they don't have a father?"

"They do. They never met him before and he never knew about them. But they do have a father and know about him now."

"Who?"

"Me. I am their Daddy."

"What? How?"

"Erm," but Harry stopped. He saw the expression on Teddy's face. Teddy was about to throw a tantrum of some kind and Harry knew it was time to act as he pulled the little boy into a tight hug. "What's wrong, Teddy?" he asked.

"You're going to leave me!" Teddy wailed. "You found your own kids and you're going to leave me just like my real parents did!"

"That's not going to happen," Harry said tightening the hug. "I love you, Teddy. You are my son and I will never stop being your Dad and I will never leave you!"

"But you have real kids now!" Teddy shot back. "I'm just adopted!"

"Teddy," Harry replied with feeling, "don't you ever think that of me! I've known you most all of your life! I've taken care of you since you were two months old! When your Gran died, it's been you and me! I adopted you! You ARE my son and that will never change! It has always been you and me, Teddy, and I am not about to change that!"

"But the 'Wicked Witch' was your wife and she hated me! She wanted me to go way!" Teddy wailed.

"Hermione is not the 'Wicked Witch,' Teddy. She would kill me if I ever thought of making you go away."

"Why should I believe that?"

"Because she is your Godmother, Teddy. She's loved you your whole life and she will think of you as her son too."

"She will?"

"She will."

"A-and th-the others?"

"You're a great kid, Teddy. They're gonna love you. You're going to be a big brother to Harry and Luna and, I hope, a great friend to Daphne. I know it will be hard at first. It's been you and me for so long. But you're a great kid and they will need you and - and well it will work out in the end. Think about it? The three of them have never flown a broom before..."

"Never?"

"Nope," Harry replied. "You're brilliant at it..."

"Not as good as you, D-Dad."

"You're only eight," Harry chuckled. "But you can teach them. And, if this does work out, they'll need a friend and brother who knows things about where we live and such. They've never been here before and a new place can be quite scary for them."

"You still I-love me?"

"I always have and always will. I adopted you, right?"

"Yeah."

"I did that because I chose you to be my son. That's special. Most parents can't choose their children. I chose you. And nothing is ever going to change that, Teddy."

"Not even your real kids?"

"Not even that."

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"What should I call Hermione?"

"That's up to you, really. If or when we get married ... she is your Godmother and may be my wife. You think you could call her 'Mum'?"

"I always wanted a Mum too," Teddy said as he slowly calmed down and soon fell to sleep in Harry's arms.

After putting Teddy to bed, Harry retired to his office to e-mail Hermione about his 'talk' with his son. All in all, he thought it went quite well, although there would be more talks in the near future as Harry knew that the change would require adjustments on both of their parts.

WEDNESDAY, 28 JUNE 2006 - SOMEWHERE IN HOLLYHEAD, WALES, U.K.

Ginny Weasley was the Captain of the Hollyhead Harpies. She had held that position since the retirement of Gwenog Jones in 2002. She joined the team in 1999 as a mid-season replacement and the team had never really been the same since. Before Ginny, the Harpies - the only all female team in the League - were usually contenders who missed the play-offs almost every year by a game or two. In her first season, Ginny had won "Rookie of the Year" honors and behind her play as Chaser led the team from middle of the pack to their first play-off spot in twenty years.

Since then, she had led the League in scoring every season and led her team to five championship titles. In 2002, she became the youngest Captain of the English All-Star team that played in that year's World Cup and led that team to the first win for England in over 300 years. She was now the highest paid player in the history of the sport and, after over six seasons, still had yet to miss a match for any reason - another League Record to add to her portfolio.

She woke up in a hotel with a couple from America. A three way like she had more than once last night was a rare yet welcome change of pace for her. Ginny was also setting records on her back or face as the case may be. The day after her ex-husband left for America for two years against her wishes, she had her first affair. It lasted three days or nights. She followed on with more "affairs" although she knew the truth was it was just about the sex. If asked, she could not tell anyone how many men she had slept with since 2002. At least two a week, usually more and sometimes many times more, she knew. Basically, she liked getting shagged often yet did not want anything or anyone to tie her down. Harry had been a

wonderful shag, but wanted her to be a wife too. He denied her what she really wanted: fame, glory, a wealthy lifestyle.

She made up for his shortcomings in the beds of countless others, a habit that had cost her when Harry had sued for an annulment. She had wanted to counter for divorce on grounds of adultery. She was convinced he had been having an affair before he left her for the States. Her problem was, she was told by her solicitor, while there was no evidence he had been unfaithful to her except her own beliefs, there was plenty by then that she had been unfaithful to him. She stood to lose her job and anything if she accused him of anything as her nightlife would then come to life. Begrudgingly and cursing all lawyers, she kept silent.

She rose from the strange bed quietly and made sure not to wake last night's entertainment. She gathered her things. There was not much. Just a slinky dress, some sandals and a purse. No underwear as she did not wear any when she set out for a good and anonymous shagging. Her things gathered, she apparated back to her flat to begin her real day as the Harpies Quidditch Captain.

She saw there was a letter in the morning's post and she opened it:

Ginny:

Was in New York last week. Saw your ex with another woman. It looks serious. Thought you'd like to know. No, didn't see her clearly at all and don't know her name.

Your special friend.

Bless Cho, she thought. For a woman, she's a good shag. Then the message sunk in. NO! HOW DARE HE! HE'S MINE!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WEDNESDAY - JUNE 28, 2006 - APPLEBEES GRILL & BAR,
CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Six young women sat around a large table at a popular chain restaurant outside of St. Louis. They were waiting for the seventh member of their weekly lunch group to arrive. Jeanette Pinot owned and was an Executive Chef at an Italian restaurant nearby. Today she was taking a day off. Brianna Antonelli, Michelle Dunston, Adriana Garza, and Agnes Smith were employees of Pak Riley Corp. Although she had the right last name, Megan Riley was an attorney and In House Counsel for Pak Riley.

"She's late," Brianna observed. "Odd for her."

"Big meeting," Megan said. "Apparently that New York thing went far better than the Boss man thought. Far better."

"Really?" Michelle asked.

Megan nodded. "I've only seen some of the reports. If even half of the contracts she brought back are agreed to by the overseas buyers, it will more than double the size of our Company within six months. Amazing, really."

"That may not explain her odd behavior since she got back," Brianna observed.

"Odd?" Agnes asked. "She just seems happy to me."

"I've known our Janie for nearly seven years," Brianna said. "She never seems that happy. She wasn't even that happy when she graduated at the top of her class fro SLU."

"I've noticed as well," Megan added. "That's not the 'look at me overachieve again' Janie happy. Something else is tickling her ... you don't suppose?"

"What?" The others asked.

"You don't suppose she's found a man?"

"Nah," Adrienne added. "Can't be. She's had dates and never fancied any of them."

"Still!"

"If she has, than all those blind dates were a waste," Michelle noted. "We all tried hard to help her in that department. I was beginning to think she wasn't into men at all."

"Girl's been obsessing over a lost love," Megan said. "Has been since we met. She said there's only one man for her - the father of her children and he's neither available nor interested. Whoever this mystery man is..."

"Assuming there is one," Agnes said.

"Assuming," Megan agreed, "he must be one amazing hunk to break into her fortress."

"All of this assumes a man," Jeanette noted. "Maybe she's just ... I don't know. I haven't seen her in over a week. I really am in no position to speculate. Oh, here she comes." Jeanette noted an odd smile on Janie's face. "Man," she whispered. "Not only that, but five bucks says they were doing the nasty all week - and he can throw a leg."

"How," Megan began.

"That's the 'I've had the best sex of my life' smile if I've ever seen it," Jeanette giggled. The others joined her.

"Sorry I'm late," Hermione said in a dreamy voice her friends had never heard before. "Most wonderful meeting," she added softly.

The other young women looked at each other and smiled.

"So," Megan said, "how was New York?"

"Perfect," Hermione sighed.

"Okay," Michelle said, "out with it, Janie!"

"Out with what?"

"It was a damned convention! I know you hate those things!"

"Oh, this one wasn't so bad..."

"You've never liked business trips," Megan began.

"True," Hermione agreed. "And this one should have been the worst. A whole week away from my babies! I've never been away from them that long - not since they were born. My Mum came to my rescue. She showed up with the whole troop the day after I arrived. Made a vacation out of it, she did - course I still had to work. Still, it was as if I never left at all. It was wonderful," she sighed again.

"You've always been a terrible liar," Adriana said.

"Honestly! My Mum did show up with the kids," Hermione protested! "Have you all ordered yet?"

"We were waiting for you."

"Well, no more about my trip until we order!" The others knew she had put her foot down, but they also knew she was hiding something - for now.

The young women ordered their lunches. Hermione ordered a spicy chicken wrap she had grown fond of. She wondered if they would be available somewhere in London, but doubted it. Not unless Applebee's crossed the pond, she thought.

"So," Michelle pressed once their waitress had left, "what really happened in New York?"

"Yeah," Megan added, "and none of this 'what happens in New York stays in New York' bull."

"I don't know what you're..." Hermione began.

"You've been acting out of sorts since you got back, Janie," Adrianna said. "We've been your friends for years and we've never seen you this..." Adrianna was at a loss for words.

"Perky?" Agnes suggested.

"Spacey?" Jeanette said.

"Bubbly?" Michelle added.

"Giggly?" Brianna added.

"Happy?" Thought Adrianna aloud.

"In love?" Megan said what the others were thinking.

Hermione could not help herself. She blushed furiously and her mouth dropped open. She could not look her friends in their eyes. Was it that obvious, she thought. She was going to tell them today. She had to. Megan was her best friend and she had known Adrianna, Jeanette and Brianna for almost seven years. She had known those four almost as long as she had known Harry, she thought. They deserved to know. And Agnes and Michelle were good friends as well. They all deserved to know.

She nodded.

"Get out," Michelle said!

"It's," Hermione began, "it's true. The Saturday after I arrived in New York, I was sitting in the Atrium of the hotel drinking a cup of coffee and reading the paper. A man sat at my table and began small talk..."

"Which you hate," Megan added.

Hermione nodded. "Anyway, I was going to ask him to either be quiet or leave so I looked at him for the first time and..."

"Love at first sight?" Jeanette suggested.

Hermione shrugged. "Something like that."

"You're not telling us everything, are you?" Megan said.

"What do you mean?"

"I've know you for almost seven years, Janie. Love at first sight? Please! You've been carrying a torch for some mystery man all that time - the father of your children. You never had much of a love life in all the time I've known you and now, all of a sudden, you're in love? With a total stranger? What's really going on?"

"Can't you be happy for me?"

"I'd love to be, Janie. I am worried about you. You're my best friend and I don't want to see you hurt."

"None of us do," Brianna added.

Hermione sighed. "Okay, maybe it wasn't really love at first sight - or maybe it was. The man in question was not a total stranger. I've known him since we were eleven. I just haven't seen him in a long time."

Megan gasped! "You found him? The mystery man? The father?"

Hermione smiled. "Actually, he found me. We would have probably run into each other anyway - he was attending the same convention - but he saw me and sat down and...well, it was almost as if the last seven years never happened."

"But you said he was married and wanted nothing to do with you or your wonderful kids?"

"He was married. Not when I was last with him, but some months later he did get married when he though I wanted nothing to do with him."

"How could he think that? You showed me some of the letters you wrote to him. They seemed to make it clear that you wanted everything to do with him."

"He never got my letters," Hermione said softly.

"What? How?"

"His then future and now ex-wife threw them away. He never got my letters. He never knew how I felt about him. He never knew he was

a father or about how wonderful our children are. He never knew any of that.

"The whole thing was tragic in a way. When I left him I was so in love with him, but thought he didn't feel the same way about me. He did, but thought I didn't feel the same way about him. He had had such a tragic life up to that point. He was so guarded with his feelings - so afraid to let anyone in who might hurt him. I was the romantic fool with a broken heart who thought that my Knight must make the first move in that regard. He didn't, and I left assuming he did not love me the way I loved him.

"But he did, and thought I didn't love him. It was a vicious circle of misunderstanding. I - I hadn't seen him in seven years. I - I was stunned when I saw him. He thought I never wanted him the way he wanted me. He said that almost from the start. B-But when I saw him sitting there, all those feelings came back and I knew I still loved him more than anything. You have no idea how my heart leapt when I learned he was no longer married. He told me he never stopped loving me and still does. When we finally kissed - well, it was over. I'm never going to let him lose me again!"

"Janie," Megan said cautiously, "you know that kind of thing only happens in fair tales, not real life."

"Ordinarily I'd agree," Janie said. "But this did happen, has happened and is still happening. I can't really explain it, except that I knew I loved him. I still love him."

"So," Brianna began, "tell us about this love of yours."

"Well," Hermione said with a smile, "I went to school with him..."

"We know that," Adriana said. "Tell us about him today!"

"Oh. He's a Chief Inspector with the Royal National Magical Police. He's second in command of their Major Crimes and Special Operations Department."

"You're in love with a cop?" Agnes chuckled.

"He was a cop when last we were together, so yes."

"Cops don't make much."

"He doesn't seem to mind," Hermione sighed. "Money is not that important to him."

"Not important?" Megan asked in shock.

"He inherited a sizable fortune from his parents and from his godfather. His annual investment income is over ten million a year - in dollars."

"You lucky girl," Jeanette said.

"And yet he works as a cop?" Michelle asked.

"He likes the job. He's been a cop since the end of the War and was the youngest in history and is one of the best. His boss is scheduled to retire at the end of this year and he's going to take over the department."

"How old is he?" Megan asked.

"He'll be twenty-six at the end of July."

"He must be pretty good at his job then."

"He's part of a lot of very successful young people in the British Magical Government known as the 'Young Turks.' Back in '01, they wrote the British Magical Charter which replaced the Enabling Statutes of 1692 as the Constitution of Magical Britain. One might say he's one of Magical Britain's Founding Fathers now."

"So was this his first time in the States?" Megan asked.

"Oh no," Hermione replied. "His first time was in '98 when he spent three months in Virginia training with the F.B.I. His department is the equivalent of the F.B.I. so he's been back often as he has a good working relationship with the Bureau. He spent two years as an Agent in the Atlanta Field Office where, apparently, he picked up a taste for southern cooking, bar-be-que and baseball."

"Don't tell me he's a Braves fan," Agnes said rolling her eyes.

"I never said he was perfect. He's close 'though."

"He's not married, right?" Brianna asked.

"Divorced," Hermione replied. "His ex used to be a friend of mine but she turned out to be a real piece of work that one."

"Kids?"

"He adopted our godson when the boy's gran passed away."

"Your godson?" Megan asked.

"Teddy," Hermione nodded. "His parents were friends of ours and were killed during the war not long after Teddy was born. Harry and I were his godparents. Well, Harry was only seventeen at the time and starting his job as what was then called an Auror and I was going back to school, so Teddy went to his gran's. I haven't seen him since he was a baby. He and my Sis share the same birthday."

"He knows about the children?"

Hermione nodded. "He spent the week with them along with four other young ones. He's a wonderful father."

"Four others? Who?"

"My ex-fiancé and his family were there as well."

"Awkward," Michelle laughed.

"It wasn't that bad," Hermione admitted.

"Any feelings for the ex?" Agnes asked.

"No." Hermione said firmly. "My ex has become a Cubs fan."

"Ouch!"

The women laughed.

"Although he also turned out to be a very successful business man."

"Really?"

"He owns Piccadilly's."

"Get out!" Brianna exclaimed.

"What was he doing in New York?" Jeanette asked.

"He's on the Board of his family's business Weasley Industries. He was there for the same reason I was."

"And he brought his kids?"

"Four of them and his wife and mother-in-law. My kids and Mum had a wonderful time with them."

"So, where does your beau live?" Brianna asked.

"When Teddy's in school, they live in a large house he owns in London. It's a block from the American Style Primary School he founded back in 1999. During the summer, they usually live at an estate he owns near Oxford."

"So," Megan asked, "where is this romance heading, Janie?"

"We're probably getting married sometime in the next six months."

"GET OUT!"

Hermione nodded.

"He's proposed?" Brianna asked.

"Not officially. He wanted to wait to get home and talk to his son first. He has asked for and received my mother's blessing so..."

"I guess this means you're moving to Britain," Brianna said with a heavy heart.

Hermione nodded. "I probably would be anyway."

"What?" several voices asked.

"This just means I won't have to look for a flat."

"What are you talking about?" Michelle asked.

"Had a meeting with the boss this morning," Hermione said. "The convention was a huge success for us. The Company is going to open a European Headquarters in London and probably a manufacturing plant there as well. I was told that they expect me to head that office and I'll be moving not later than the end of August."

"So you're leaving us?" Adriana asked.

Hermione nodded sadly. She really liked these friends and wished she could bring them all with her. "I'll be back often enough," she said. "And you are all welcome to come and visit as well. But yes, I will be moving back home."

"You really do love him Janie?" Megan asked.

"I really do."

"Then I am happy for you. And I'll see to it that Pat, the kids and I take you up on your offer as often as we can. Besides, the kids should see the old country."

"Thanks."

"Does this friend snatching lothario have a name?" Agnes asked. "I mean a name other than Harry Friend-Snatching-Lothario?"

The young women laughed.

"Yes he does," Hermione said. "It's Harry Potter."

"You don't mean THE Harry Potter, do you Janie?" Megan asked. "Not the Boy-Who-Lived?"

"Who's that?" Agnes asked.

"Only the most famous and most eligible bachelor in Magical Britain," Megan explained. "He defeated Voldemort as a baby to end the First War and again to end the Second! Never met him myself, but I did have a bit of a crush on him as a lass. Most girls did! He's

the magical equivalent of Prince William! Teen Witch Weekly had an annual issue solely dedicated to him!"

"A celebrity?"

"More than that," Megan said. "A living legend as I recall. So, Janie, is that your boyfriend?"

Hermione was blushing furiously. She could only nod.

Megan laughed. "Talk about a secret! I've known you practically since you arrived here! Almost seven years! And here you are getting ready to marry The-Boy-Who-Lived!"

"He hates that name," Hermione said softly.

"And you're not really 'Janie', are you?"

"Jane is my middle name," Hermione whispered.

"You're Hermione Granger?" Megan asked.

Hermione nodded. She wanted to cry but fought back the tears.

"Janie? Are you okay?" Michelle asked.

Hermione shook her head.

"What's wrong?"

"You all must hate me," Hermione said in a small voice.

"Why would we hate you?" Megan asked.

"F-for keeping my past a secret."

"Janie," Megan said, "it was a horrible war. There are things that happened to Pat and I we don't tell anyone. And we were not part of the 'Golden Trio.' We never fought scores of Death Eaters or had to face Voldemort. I can understand why you wanted to forget..."

"It's not that," Hermione said. "I can had have been able to live with that. I never could stand the attention. Harry hates it too, but he's

used to it. I could not face that. I could not have my children face that and now..."

"And now you plan to marry your one true love and in so doing return to that world."

Hermione nodded. "I want this quiet for as long as can be. I want this quiet for my children."

"Our secret then," Megan said as the other witches nodded in agreement. "Oh, and we are happy for you, Janie."

"Our Janie is going to run off and marry her Prince Charming," Michelle cooed. "Oh what a lucky girl!"

"Just try and remember us little people when you're famous," Jeanette added with a laugh.

"I'll try," Hermione said laughing in return.

THURSDAY - JUNE 29, 2006 - RISTORANTE DA VINCI, CENTRAL LONDON, U.K.

Harry sat at a table in his favorite restaurant waiting for his two guests to arrive. To pass the time, he drew a folded up copy of an e-mail he received from Hermione to read for at least the fifth time. It was this e-mail that had prompted him to invite his guests to lunch today. Harry was planning something. His eyes fell on the now treasured paper and he began to read:

Harry My Love:

The most amazing thing has happened, My Aragon! I had a meeting with my Boss this morning about the results of the New York trip - and no, it was not about meeting you but what I managed to accomplish. The accounts I signed up far exceeded our expectations even if you do not include the bids from the British Ministry! The result will more than double my company's business in the next year or so.

So what does this mean?

I'm moving to London!

I've been made the Head of European Operations and we are opening up our London Offices this fall! I can move whenever I want provided I am in London not later than the beginning of September! Isn't this wonderful?

I've already spoken to Mum and the kids about it. The kids are a little concerned about leaving their friends, but they all cannot wait to see you again and Harry and Luna cannot wait for you to be their "everyday" Daddy! (And I cannot wait to be your "everyday" girl.)

I love you so much, Harry!

I miss you so much. But now, it is as if my prayers have been answered. I am coming to you and when we meet again, I will never, ever let you leave me again! I wish you were here now so I could celebrate properly by hugging and kissing you and then making love to you until we both walk funny! But that will have to wait a bit.

As I am already planning on coming to London in a few weeks, would it be possible to use that as my family's move? Do you want me? Do you want to be a family? Can we move in with you and Teddy?

I cannot wait!

I love you more and more each day, Harry.

Hermione.

Harry looked at a copy of his reply.

Hermione:

In answer to all of your questions: YES!

Love,

Your Harry forever!

"Lo Sparks," a deep voice sounded. Harry looked up and saw Dudley and Jena Dursley taking a seat at the table.

"Tuney's watching the kids," Jena said.

Harry nodded.

"So what's this about?" Dudley began.

"Later," Harry said. "There are others who will need to be here."

The two Dursley's nodded and began looking at their menus.

"Hey Harry," another voice called as Neville and Luna Longbottom joined him at the table. "So what's this about?"

"Shhh," Dudley said, "or he'll make you sign the Official State Secrets Act."

"Oh."

"What's that?" Luna added.

"Something that you don't want to sign," Dudley replied.

A few minutes later the last two chairs at the table were filled. Harry smiled slightly as Draco and his wife Astoria sat down.

"Ah, now the gang's all here," Harry said brightly.

"Much as I like this restaurant and appreciate a free meal, what are we doing here?" Draco asked.

"You have been my friends ever since the War and, in Neville's case long before then," Harry said. "I need your help with something."

"This wouldn't happen to have anything to do with that bird you met in New York?" Draco asked.

Harry nodded. "I'm going to marry her."

"That's wonderful," Luna said. "But who is she?"

"Some American named Janie according to the papers," Draco said.

"The reporters are falling all over themselves to figure out who she is and where she lives," Astoria Malfoy added.

"And that's why I need your help," Harry said. "I want them off somewhere else for a while."

"How long?" Neville asked.

"End of July they're going to find out. Until then, I want them as far away from her as possible."

"Why do you care?" Draco asked. "She's gonna be in the spotlight anyway. Why delay?"

"There are extenuating circumstances."

"Such as?"

Harry handed Draco a photograph. "That's me with 'Janie' and our two children."

"Bloody hell!" Draco exclaimed. "You found her? You found Granger?"

Harry nodded. "Always the last place you would think of looking. In my case, it was a table at breakfast at the hotel I was staying in in New York."

"Children?" Neville asked.

"About seven years ago, Hermione had a falling out with Weasley. She came to my place because she really had nowhere else to go. She had caught Weasley with another woman and ... well, I think you get the picture. I took her in - as a friend. My former wife came by and ordered me to kick her out. Couldn't do that. She was my friend. The ex gave me an ultimatum and I dumped her, not Hermione.

"Hermione was only there for a couple of weeks. She was then heading off to Australia to find her parents. Well, we kind of got together and..."

"And you knocked her up," Draco sniggered.

"Crude but accurate."

"You knocked her up and had nothing to do with her since?"

"Actually, I never heard from her since."

"So why now? Why after all these years does she come back when she seemingly wanted nothing to do with you?"

"She wrote me, Draco. She wrote to me often. She told me about the kids and everything."

"And you did nothing?" Draco seemed almost incredulous.

"Never got the letters," Harry said. "Ginny was filtering my mail. Had I found out, I would have been on the first plane to the States to see her."

"That bitch!" Luna exclaimed. "And to think she used to be a friend!"

Harry shrugged. "I picked the wrong girl."

"Obviously," Draco said. "It's a wonder you never caught a disease from her."

Harry shrugged. It wasn't long after Harry had moved to Atlanta that he had learned the truth about Ginny Potter. She was a professional Quidditch star at the time and enjoyed the perks that went with it. In her case, it meant sleeping with players and fans when she was on the road. In preparing for the Annulment, Harry learned that she had slept with no less than one hundred men during the course of her career to date and it was well known within the league that she was into multiple partners as well. If you wanted a party, you called Ginny Potter for some carnal fun. Harry never used that information. It was his trump card if it looked like she might have a case. She didn't, but if she ever interfered with his family in any way, the reports, photos and videos would be made public.

"So, you and Granger," Draco said.

"She's moving back," Harry said. "She and her family are going to move in with me later this summer. I've asked her - unofficially - and she has agreed. We will be getting married."

"Congratulations," Draco said. "Bout bloody time!"

"Thanks."

"When?" Neville asked.

"That's why you're here today," Harry replied. "Hermione and I are not yet officially engaged. I feel we are as does she and I've already asked for and received her mother's blessing, but no ring yet. What I am planning to do is ask her the day she arrives."

"And when is that?" Dudley asked.

"July 22nd," Harry replied. "She and her family will be here then and will stay in London with me for a few days before we head out to the Manor."

"So you need help proposing?" Jena asked cheekily.

"I think I can handle that bit all by myself, thank you," Harry replied with a laugh. "No, I would like your help with the following Saturday."

"Your picnic?" Neville asked.

Harry nodded. "And, I hope, my wedding day."

"Wedding day?" Astoria asked. "Does she know?"

"Nope," Harry said. "Not yet."

"Why not?"

"I figured I'd make it a surprise, sort of. We'd get it all arranged and such. Nothing we can't back out of, mind you. When I officially propose, I will hopefully be able to tell her that in one week she'll have the wedding of her dreams at my Manor. The guests are already the people I would invite anyway. So, aside from certain arrangements I hope you'll help me with, it's ready to go."

"What about her guests, Harry?" Jena asked.

"Her mother and sister will be there."

"Surely she has friends. Surely she has friends she would want to be with her on that day."

"Sorry. I hadn't thought of that."

"You should have," Astoria scolded. "A wedding is about the Bride and her family, stupid."

Harry nodded. "I want this a secret. I want it to be a surprise for her. But you're right. First off, she'll have to know before it happens. Secondly, if I didn't invite her friends, she'd be upset. Still, I want this to remain a surprise for as long as possible."

"Why?" Neville asked.

"Press," Harry said. "They get wind that Hermione Granger is coming home, they'll have a field day. They find out she's coming to be with me, it's even going to be worse. I want us married so Hermione' family and my family are spared any of the more creative articles about our relationship."

"Besides," Jena said, "it is kind of romantic. Got a honeymoon planned?"

"Er..."

"You don't?"

"Kind of, I guess. After my birthday, we are going to St. Louis for a few days. I want to see where she and my children lived and she's taking us to some baseball games. After that, the whole hoard is off to Disney World for about ten days."

"But what about the two of you?" Luna asked.

"I plan on having a nice, private room with just her just like we had in New York."

"Still, a little alone time would be nice."

"I do have a villa in St. Tropez. Never been there, but still. Maybe a couple of days there?"

"That would be a good idea," Jena said.

"Not to spoil the fun," Draco said, "but just how can we keep this secret?"

"Right now," Harry replied, "the only people in Britain who know that Hermione exists and that we are together again are you lot, Ron and Lavender Weasley and their kids and my Aunt Tuny and Teddy."

"Lavender knows? How?" Luna asked.

"They were at the same hotel we were in New York."

"That secret won't last three minutes," Draco noted. "Lavender can't keep that one."

"She's allowed to tell about 'Janie.'" Harry replied. "She's agreed to keep the true identity of Janie secret for now. The story is she and I met in Atlanta when I lived there years ago. Lav seems to be onboard with the idea. She's thrilled about what will happen when the truth comes out because she 'scooped' her friend Parvati."

"It might work," Luna said. "She loves knowing something Parvati doesn't."

"She's my Trojan Horse," Harry nodded. "She's going to keep the press looking in all the wrong places."

"Does she know about this bit?" Dudley asked.

"No. And she won't know until the picnic."

"It might work," Draco nodded. "You're doing this to keep the media out, right?"

Harry nodded. "That and to surprise her."

"And how do we fit in?"

"Obviously, I need help with the details."

"You want us to help plan this wedding?" Astoria asked.

"If you are willing. Yes. You're my friends."

"I'd love to!"

Everyone else nodded in agreement.

"Okay," Harry said. "I've got a list of things that need doing. I'll work on the invites for Hermione's friends. I've also selected the bonder, assuming he agrees. I'm meeting with him this weekend. But, we need a cake, tent, decorations, stuff for a reception, music, the works! Oh, and dresses for the bride and bridesmaids."

"And who will they be?" Luna asked.

"My guess is her Mum, her sister and our daughter."

"Don't you think Hermione should select them?"

"You're right. I'll call her Mum. I think she may be able to handle anything from that end."

"Groomsmen?"

"Dud? You feel up to another round as Best Man?"

"Got your back, Harry."

"I'm also thinking Neville, Draco, Teddy and my son Harry. "There are others as well depending upon the number of Bridesmaids, I guess."

"And the rest of us?" Draco asked.

"You three can sing. I've heard you."

"I know what I will sing," Luna said.

Harry saw Draco and Astoria look at one another. "We do as well, Scarhead," Draco said. "We're here for you Mate."

"Thanks."

"We'll make sure Hermione has a day to remember," Astoria added.

"Thanks guys," Harry said. "This means a lot to me."

"So tell us," Luna asked, "what's Hermione been up to all these years?"

As Harry passed around photos of him, Hermione, his kids and the other Grangers, he told them of what his Hermione had been doing since she left Britain.

THURSDAY - 29 JUNE 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY,
CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

The phone was ringing and Rose Granger picked up. "Hello?"

"Rose Granger?" a man's voice asked.

"Speaking?"

"Hi, it's Harry."

"Hermione's not home yet, Harry."

"Good. It's you I wanted to talk to."

"Oh?"

"I want to throw something past you and see what you think, but I don't want you to tell Hermione. It's a surprise."

"What do you have in mind?" Rose said suppressing a giggle.

"How's a surprise wedding sound?"

"Harry, just 'cause I gave you my blessing... What are you on about?"

"Here's the idea. You all are coming here the 22nd, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, depending upon how Hermione is feeling, I was thinking of taking her out to dinner that night and officially proposing to her. Ring and all that stuff."

"She'd love that."

"And I am almost certain she'll say yes."

"She'd better."

"So, then the question is when? You know she's moving here this summer, right?"

"She told me last night. She's really excited."

"So I was thinking and I have this annual picnic at my Manor the next weekend where all the people we both knew are going to attend and I thought..."

"Ready made wedding," Rose chuckled.

"Half of one at least," Harry said. "I want to surprise Hermione with the idea. I already have friends here working on arrangements but it's her day and I would like input from you on this. I also was told that I should include her friends in this event and need to find out how to contact them. I will pay for them to come over, of course."

"Harry, you don't have to do this."

"What do you mean? Marry your daughter or arrange the wedding?"

"The wedding."

"I want to. I want to do this for her."

"And you want it to be a surprise?"

"Yes. But I want her input. A friend suggested you could talk to her about what she would like - hypothetically speaking - then you could e-mail my friends who will make it happen."

"When and where will this wedding take place?"

"July 29th in a tent - weather permitting at my Manor. Otherwise it will be in the ballroom."

"We're Catholic. We'd need a dispensation from the Bishop not to have it in a church."

"I'm meeting with Father O'Leary this week."

"Father O'Leary?"

"He's my parish Priest. I'm Catholic too. So there you go. Also, I looked into this way back when. My family has been married either at the Manor or at St. Michael's Chapel a couple of miles down the road for centuries. If we can't get a dispensation, we will just have the marriage blessed the next day at Mass. It's done quite frequently and with the blessing, the marriage is valid in the eyes of the Church."

"I didn't know that. And your prior marriage? I know it was magically annulled. But what about the church?"

"Annulled years ago. Defect as to form. I was not about to let that stand in the way of a real marriage, Mrs. Granger."

"Church has already annulled it?"

"Got the papers to prove it."

"So this is going to be valid?"

"I know she would not want it any other way."

"So what do you want me to do?"

"I guess get Hermione thinking about it. Select the guests she wants to bring over, bridesmaids, dresses, that sort of thing."

"I can probably give you a partial guest list now, if that will help."

"I'd appreciate it."

"First off there's Jack and Pamela Martin. They've been friends of ours since we moved here. They have three children who would have to come as well: Jason, Cynthia and Alicia.

"Then there her friends from school: Megan and Pat Riley and their four children, Antonio and Adriana Garza and their three children, Brianna Antonelli, Simon and Michelle Dunston and their three children, Jeanette Pinot and her husband George and their two young ones, and Agnes and Eric Smith and their three children."

"Some list," Harry said with a chuckle. "No worries. Okay, should you contact them or should I?"

"I'll handle that. You just make sure they can get there."

"I was planning on paying for any guests coming across the pond. That includes travel and lodging and a few days for them to see the sites if they want."

"Wonderful. How many in the wedding party do you think?"

"I suppose that's Hermione's decision, don't you?"

"You're right. Just out of curiosity, how big is this picnic of yours?"

"Last year we had over three hundred families in attendance including children. It was over one thousand guests all told."

"And they will all know about this?"

"Most will not find out until the day of the wedding. I have a few folks helping me on this end and I am pretty sure that they can keep this under wraps."

"Hermione will be thrilled," Rose said with a chuckle.

"So you'll help out?"

"Of course I will."

"Thanks. E-mail me with anything we need to get done over here, okay?"

"Sure thing," Rose said. Then she heard the front door open and her daughter call out that she was home. "Harry? Hermione just got in. Do you want to speak to her?"

"Please?"

"Janie?" Rose called, "Harry's on the phone!"

Harry could hear a squeal of delight in the background. Finally, an excited voice spoke to him.

"Harry!" Hermione said with joy in her voice. "It's wonderful you called."

"Hi, Hermione."

"But it must be frightfully late over there."

"Not too late, Love. We're only six hours ahead of you."

"But that's almost Midnight!"

"What's a little lost sleep compared with talking to the love of my life?"

"So you got my e-mail?" she asked in an excited voice.

"Sure did."

"Isn't this exciting! We're going to be together even sooner than I had hoped!"

"It's wonderful, Hermione."

"So, why'd you call?"

"To talk to you, of course. And your Mum."

"Why Mum?"

"Well, since you'll be moving before the end of the summer, I thought it might be a good idea to start thinking of wedding plans."

"Harry!" she squealed again. "That's a wonderful idea! But we're not even engaged yet."

"Never too early to start planning," Harry said.

"We don't even have a date."

"Still, I think we were thinking before the end of the year, right?"

"Right."

"So we need to get the ball rolling, I think. At least we should know what you want for everything before you arrive this summer. We can then talk about dates and such."

"Sounds wonderful, Harry. What are your thoughts?"

"Well, aside from where, I'm leaving most of it up to you and your Mum."

"And where will he hold this?"

"One of two places. My family has married at one of them for the past ten generations or more. Most often, we hold the wedding and reception at my Manor outside of Oxford. Occasionally, we've held it at St. Michael's Chapel down the road. It all depends on the number of guests."

"I haven't even begun to think about that."

"Well, your Mum gave me a start."

"How so?"

"She suggested we invite Brianna, the Dunstons, the Garzas, the Martins, Jeanette and George, the Rileys and the Smiths."

"I'd like that. But how will they get there? How will they pay for it?"

"You leave that to me, Love. If they accept, I will pay for their trip across the pond."

"Harry! That's too much."

"Love, it's the least I can do. You deserve the wedding of your dreams!"

"Thank you, Harry. So how's this going to work?"

"You and your Mum will decide what you want. She'll e-mail me and I and my helpers will make it happen."

"Helpers?"

"I've already enlisted the aid of some friends who can keep their mouths shut and are eager to help in this endeavor."

"Who would that be?"

"Neville and Luna Longbottom..."

"Neville's married? To Luna?"

"Yes. He married Luna last December. Long story. It's probably best if they tell it. She's expecting, you know."

"That's wonderful. Who else?"

"My Cousin Dudley and his wife Jena."

"You two are getting along?"

"Yes, Love. What happened before is water under the bridge."

"Okay. Who else?"

"Draco and Astoria Malfoy. Astoria owns a wedding shop in Diagon Alley, if you must know. She's mailed her catalog to you and you should get it in the next couple of days."

"You really are amazing, you know that."

"Thanks. I try."

The conversation then turned to the upcoming move and children and their vacation plans, something Harry was probably going to

alter slightly. They spoke for over an hour before Harry let out a yawn which Hermione heard quite clearly.

"Harry love? You tired?"

"It's a bit past my bedtime, Angel."

"Well, you should get some sleep then."

"Okay."

"I love you and miss you Harry?"

"Love you too and miss you."

"Bye!"

"Bye!"

Tired as he was, it took some time for Harry to fall to sleep as he went over all that had to get done in order for him to surprise Hermione with a wedding in one month's time. The one thing working in Harry's favor was that magic works wonders. Once everything was sorted out, just a few wand waves from the wedding folks and everything would be ready. He fell asleep and dreamed of his future bride.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MONDAY - JULY 3rd, 2006 - MAJOR CRIMES AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS DIVISION, ROYAL NATIONAL MAGICAL POLICE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry chuckled to himself as he sent an e-mail off to Draco's wife at his shop. The Granger women were truly a force of nature, he had concluded.

Harry reflected back upon his last wedding. Molly Weasley had done most of the planning and it was held at the Burrow just as Bill and Fleur's had been. Even though many of the arrangements were similar if not identical, it had taken Molly and Ginny months to decide on any of the details such as guest lists, bridesmaids, dresses, basically everything of importance.

Not so the Grangers. Harry already had the list of guests who were planning to attend. It was the same list that Rose had given him. He also had a list of the bridesmaids and was told that Daphne and Luna would be flower girls. The six bridesmaids, Hermione and the girls were planning on getting measured and fitted for dresses the upcoming Saturday and Hermione hoped to have decided on the dresses by then. She had received the catalog on Friday and had already narrowed down the choices to two wedding dresses and three different styles of bridesmaids dresses. She was going to let her friends decide on the bridesmaids dresses as, after all, they were the ones who would have to wear them and hoped they'd help her pick her dress.

She had already picked the cake, the invitations, the types of floral arrangement she wanted (all white), the tent style, the backdrop where they would say their vows. She had also picked conservative, Muggle style tuxedos for Harry and the groomsmen. Harry had already received e-mails from all the Granger guests, all of whom knew of the proposed date of the wedding and were asking for travel information. Last night, Harry had made arrangements for all the American guests, including his former partner Kevin Malone, an Agent with the F.B.I. who was eager to return to Britain for a visit with his family.

The American guests would arrive at Heathrow by international portal the Wednesday before the wedding. Harry had arranged a

bus to pick them up and bring them to the Manor where they would stay for the wedding itself. Following the wedding, any of the guests who wanted to was offered a one week travel package for London, England, Scotland and / or Ireland, all expenses paid. He informed the guests it was his "thank you" for coming "across the pond" for a simple outdoor wedding.

With six bridesmaids, Harry found himself short on groomsmen, even with his former partner Kevin Malone. As Ron already knew of Harry and Hermione and was part of Harry's disinformation campaign, Harry decided he would ask him, however Ron would join the party at the last possible moment. He told Ron why and even Ron had to agree that acting innocent was more important. At least Ron would be there. He decided to ask Dean Thomas, an old friend from school and fellow cop in his Department. Hermione had said she wanted everything ready to go - but for the date - within two weeks so she could then turn her attention to the move.

It would seem that she and her Mum would more than meet that schedule. She had even already registered at Piccadilly's (under the name Janie). She had sent Harry the gift registration and Harry knew there were not nearly enough guests in the know to buy everything. No worries, Harry chuckled, I'll just buy what's left. One of the reasons why things were coming together so fast was because money was no object.

The phone on Harry's desk rang.

"Chief Inspector Potter," Harry answered.

"Hey Harry," a voice answered, "it's Ron."

"Speak of the Devil," Harry laughed, "I was just thinking of giving you a ring."

"So you read the article in today's Daily Prophet?"

"No. Been busy with other things. What about it?"

"Operation 'Janie' is off and running, Mate! The bloody wankers are chasing ghosts! Lav was brilliant."

"I'll give it a read."

"So what were you gonna call me about?"

"I seem to be short a couple of groomsmen," Harry said.

"What? You are talking about our mutual friend right?"

"Yep."

"You're getting married?"

"Yep."

"Bloody hell! And you want me in the wedding? After what happened the last time and all that?"

"I am willing to give it a try, Ron. I need someone who knows and can keep this quiet for now."

"When is it?"

"Day of the picnic, and no Hermione does not know yet. Gonna surprise her with it, I hope."

"A surprise wedding?"

"Yep. She's already working on the plans, just doesn't know the date yet. The way she and her Mum are going, it should all be arranged within the next two weeks."

"Bloody hell! Does anyone else know?"

"Her mum does as do all of her bridesmaids. There are a few of us on this side of the pond and you, of course."

"You think she'll say yes to this?"

"Almost certain. When she hears all her friends are going to be there, I'm even more certain."

"So you're engaged?"

"Not officially. Unofficially, I've asked and she's said yes, but I haven't given her a ring, yet."

"What about her job? Her home? All that?"

"She's moving here in a few weeks. Her work in New York is resulting in her company opening a European Headquarters here in London. She's been tapped to head it up. Her mum and the rest are coming over as well."

"Where will she live?"

"Where do you think?"

"Blimey! What about her Mum and Sis?"

"Package deal."

"Man! I mean I do like my in-laws, but I'm not sure I'd want to live with them. Then again, Mrs. Granger is nice."

"I happen to agree, but Mrs. Granger, Hermione and her Sis Daphne are three versions of the same person in many ways."

"Better you than me, Mate. So, when are you going to spring this on her?"

"Well, she arrived on the 22nd. I'm hoping to propose officially then. Sometime between then and Wednesday following I'll let her know."

"Why Wednesday?"

"That's when all her friends from the States arrive at the Manor."

"Um, congratulations?"

"Thanks Ron."

"And you really want me to stand with you?"

"You were our best friend for years. We've seemed to mend some fences. Yes."

"I won't be the Best Man, will I? I pretty much bollixed that up last time."

"Your replacement has agreed to give it another shot. He did really well in the pinch."

"Pity I missed it. But no worries. I'm not about to get pissed before you two get hitched."

"And after?"

"Lav will kill me for anything approaching a repeat performance."

"Good to know. You in?"

"Is Malfoy in?"

"You won't have to stand next to him or sit near him, Ron. Draco is a friend, so of course I want him as part of this."

"I guess. I guess I can put up with it. I'm in. I'm really happy for you, Harry."

"Thanks."

"Can I tell Lav?"

"Can she keep it secret?"

"She's already said that if you two set a date, she's going to let it leak out you're planning a trip to Las Vegas to get hitched with 'Janie' before an Eldric impersonator, whatever that is."

"It's 'Elvis'," Harry laughed. "That'll work."

"You really want me to be a part of this?"

"Yes Ron."

"And Hermione?"

"Spoke to her last night. She wants you to be a part of this as well."

Harry heard a snuffle over the phone.

"I - I'd be honored, Harry."

"Thanks Ron."

"N-need any help with the arrangements?"

"Nope. So far the Granger girls are going like gangbusters."

"Okay. Thanks Harry. This means a lot to me."

"No problem. Just make sure you get fitted for your suit. Astoria's in Diagon Alley is where you need to go."

"Astoria's, got it. Not Picadilly's?"

"Hermione registered with your store for gifts if you must know."

"Brilliant! I'll see that she gets the best!"

"Thanks Ron."

"Read the Prophet, will you?" Ron added with a laugh.

"I'll do that."

"See you later."

"Bye Ron." The two then hung up.

Harry then picked up the morning paper and saw the article in question:

CHOSEN ONE CHOSEN!

By Rita Skeeter: Daily Prophet, 26 June 2006.

A loyal reader and frequent source for me was in New York on holiday recently. Who should she see but the most eligible bachelor in all of Wizing Britain. While the rich, famous and utterly desirable Harry Potter is frequently abroad, this time seems to be an exception to his clean image and a dash to the hopes of witches

throughout the land. He was seen in the arms of a buxom blonde American bimbo who clearly had our hero eating out of the palm of her hand.

My loyal reader informs be that the young tart was clearly enhanced in certain areas of her anatomy by an engorgement charm of some type.

"They were un-natural," she told me. "Boobs that big don't float, they sag!"

Our hero was clearly taken with this trollop and was seen in her arms time and again. My source said that she really hoped they knew to get a room because she was all over him and he all over her. My source did approach them at a time when they were not pressing the laws of indecent exposure and learned that the bimbo in question was an American witch named Janie Grayson from somewhere out west. The obvious gold digging bint had latched onto our hero and is clearly using her feminine wiles to get her hands on his fortune, says my confidential source. "Then again, she is from Hollywood California." Apparently this is common place there in both the magical and non-magical worlds.

"It's a fair bet she needed no love potion," my source tells me. "With her body and her clear desire, few men could stand a chance. Only a Veela is more of a threat to a man, from a sexual perspective." My source claims that the two had no shame whatsoever. "They all but did it in the Lobby of our Hotel!"

Could it be? Could the upstanding Auror have given in to pure lust? Was there a potion involved? Or is he just another MAN? Readers, one thing is for certain, Harry Potter is, for now, off the market!...

As to the whereabouts of his former flame Hermione Granger, that remains a mystery.

Harry could not help but chuckle. There was no way this woman in the article could be confused with Hermione. The press would be off to California in search of this mystery woman while his love would be safe in St. Louis. He decided to e-mail the article to Hermione noting that as unflattering as it was, it took the heat off her. He, on the other hand, was going to be grilled by the press and maybe his boss. He didn't care. As long as Hermione and his kids were out of

the glare, he would accept anything. He would even be willing to confirm certain aspects of the story just to keep the press looking in all the wrong places.

The door to his office then burst open.

"POTTER," the woman screamed as Harry saw his boss Amanda Savage enter with her copy of the day's paper. "TELL ME THIS IS A PACK OF LIES!"

"It's a pack of lies," Harry chuckled.

"Then why is it in the paper?"

"Oh, I don't know," Harry said clearly feigning innocence, "I guess because Ms. Skeeter has not morals?"

Savage closed the door. "What are you up to?"

"Skeeter baiting," Harry said. "The bint cannot help herself," he added with a laugh.

"Skeeter baiting?"

"Why anyone would hire that bitch is beyond me," Harry said. "She must be the editor's little whore. I've won two lawsuits against that paper, three against her, damn near bankrupted them and yet they still keep her and print this rubbish. Freedom of the Press, they say."

"So how did they get this?"

"A friend of mine who was in New York planted the story at my request. I did not know what she would say, but I am impressed."

"She?"

"She's married to another friend of mine, Boss. I'd never cross that line. She's baiting Skeeter as a favor, okay?"

Savage looked at her deputy. He was hiding something, she could tell, but he was not lying to her. "Why are you doing this?"

"Same reason as always. I want Skeeter on the dole."

"There's going to be more articles like this?"

"Probably."

"And you're not bothered?"

"Not particularly. The Prophet is not reputable in my opinion."

"And what about the other rags."

"My public position is 'no comment.' Let them figure it out."

"Is there a woman in your life, Harry?"

"There always has been. It is her who I am protecting, okay?"

Savage nodded. Harry was always so friggin' noble about some things. If he was protecting someone, he would go to the ends of the world to keep them safe.

"Who?" she asked.

"It will all be made clear in a few weeks," Harry replied calmly.
"That's all I will say for now."

Savage had never tracked his social life, Harry knew. She probably should have as he had with his subordinates just in case. She knew his response closed the door on her curiosity.

"Fine," Savage said. "You're just setting them up?"

"Most definitely, Boss."

"And I can assume there'll be more of these seedy articles about you?"

"Can't say, but I can't rule it out. The bastards will print anything and Skeeter's source is under my control."

Savage nodded. "Try not to embarrass the Department too much."

"Wouldn't think of it. Private life stuff, you know."

"Still..."

"Boss, it won't cross that line."

"Fine! And how's the Drexler case coming?"

Harry then changed gears to brief the boss on his most important ongoing investigation.

MONDAY - 3 JULY 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY, CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Hermione did not know whether to laugh or get angry about the Skeeter article. She knew she and Harry were affectionate in public, but if the article was to be believed, they were practically shagging in public. Then again, she in no way resembled the mystery woman who was now the object of Harry's advances. She wondered who the 'source' was although she had a good idea. As she pondered his e-mail, her phone rang.

"Hello?" she asked.

"Hermione?" Harry's voice replied.

"Harry!," she exclaimed with momentary glee. "Um, do you mind explaining this article you sent me?"

"Lav at her finest," Harry said glibly. "She's got the fourth estate looking in the wrong place for the wrong woman!"

"This some kind of plot?"

"I'm taking the bitch and her rag down this time, Love. I've had it with them! I've sued them and won three times! This time, they will lose all credibility!"

"And Lav?"

"She's sick of the bastards as well. She's going to keep feeding them false information as their hoards of reporters head out to California to find the blonde bint with gravity defying boobs!"

"Good luck on that one," Hermione laughed, "Silicon Valley's is not just where the computer companies are. L.A. is it's own 'Silicon Valley,' as in boob job valley."

"My thoughts exactly, Love. Meanwhile, you and the family are out of the spotlight for now. Skeeter clones will be grilling every potential Hollywood starlet and hooker for weeks trying to find the gal who does not exist!"

"Lav's idea?"

"It was."

"Thank her for me."

"I will, but the best is yet to come!"

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"Lav's going to leak - in a few weeks mind you - that I am heading to Vegas to marry the bint. She's going to time it so that the press bolts just as you arrive here."

"She is evil, isn't she?"

"Should have been a Slytherin."

"She is brave too."

"And the manky hat wanted me in Slytherin as well."

"It did?"

"It did."

"Then why were you sorted into Gryffindor?"

"Cause I wanted nothing to do with Malfoy at the time," Harry said. "The git was sorted into Slytherin and I told the hat any House but Slytherin or nor house at all, I did. And, after trying to get me to change my mind, off I was to be your friend."

"You wanted to be with me?"

"Deep down? Yes. I would have settled for any other House, but I wanted to be in yours. Ron was not sorted yet, you were. So I hoped, and then I was sorted into your House, Hermione."

"You loved me even then?" she asked in a whisper.

"I was eleven," he replied softly. "I was eleven and had never even been hugged before. I knew what love was, but that was for someone else, not me. But yes, even then. I saw in you, I felt in you a kindred spirit, someone I could relate to on a whole different level. Ron became my best mate, but you were and are always my best friend and the one person I have always loved above all things."

"Harry?" Hermione whimpered.

"Took me far too long to see it. Had I grown up in a loving household, maybe. I lost you because I did not know what I had and could not understand how wonderful it was, Love. It took losing you to see what I had truly found. Now that I've found it, I am not about to lose it again!"

Harry could only here crying at the other end of the phone.

"Love, please tell me those are happy tears," he said softly.

"Th-th-they are."

"Good."

"B-b-but y-you hate w-weepy women."

"I did," Harry admitted. "But I love you, weepy and all. As long as your tears are happy ones, I can live with it."

"F-from now on?" Hermione cried softly.

"From now on."

"I love you too," she said in a small voice. "I miss you!"

"Only a few more weeks, Angel. Then the missing goes away forever."

"F-few more weeks."

"Wish I could hold you now, Love."

"M-me too."

"Not long, My Angel," Harry said softly, "not long 'til I can hold you again."

"N-not long," Hermione agreed. "H-Harry?"

"Yes, My Arwen?"

"W-why me?"

Harry knew what she was asking. She was asking why did he love her and not someone else.

"You are my life, Hermione," Harry said. "You've been my life for so long. I am not even me without you. I cannot be me without you. You are the kindest, most caring, selfless person I've ever met. Long ago I stopped being me and became us. I did not understand at the time, but I do now. I cannot be me without you in my life. Without you, I just exist but do not truly live nor can I truly live. You are the love I never had before. You are the reason I wake up each morning. In your arms, I can sleep. Knowing you love me, I have no nightmares. You are the mother of my children and I cannot see another in your stead. I was complete when we were together before, even if we had not yet figured out how each other truly felt. I am complete now that we have. The seven years we were apart were seven years of emptiness for me, Hermione. I knew it from the moment you walked down that jet way. I knew then. I am nothing without you!"

"H-Harry?" she asked in a small voice, "I feel and have felt the same way for so long."

"Then you will be my wife?"

"Yes, love. Are we engaged?"

"In all but proof, Angel. But I intend the proof to be there soon, if you'll have me."

"Proof?"

"Ring and everything, Angel."

"I'll - I'll have you, my Aragon."

"G-good. Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being. I love you, Hermione, with all my heart and soul."

"I love you too, Harry. You are the reason I exist."

"It's late Love," Harry said. "At least it is here."

"Dream of me?"

"I promise."

"Good night, my Aragon."

"Good night, my Love."

FRIDAY - JULY 7, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry sat on the couch in his living room going over two checklists he had drawn up. The first was the checklist for the picnic itself. Aside from buying food and beverages, taking delivery of about one hundred or so pounds of ribs and brisket, and setting up the back lawn as he always did, there was not much left to do to get ready. He was actually a little ahead of the game this year. He turned to the guest list and the mail to add additional names to the list. Each family that decided to attend would need a special portkey to pass through the wards that protected his Manor.

The guest list was segregated into categories. The first category was labeled "Young Turks." There were twenty-nine names on the list as Harry was number thirty. Over half had families and they were all coming, as usual. They all had attended each of the last few years and they were the ones who brought the food.

Harry went down the list of who was bringing what:

Harry, of course, would be smoking ribs and brisket, but there would be two others doing the same, although with very different styles. Harry smoked with a dry rub for hours before beginning to glaze the meat with a red barbeque sauce of his own invention. Katie (Bell) Morrison had met her husband while attending the University of South Carolina. He preferred just the rub. Roger Davies had attended the University of North Carolina and used a vinegar based glaze. It was all very good and allowed people to pick a flavor they preferred.

Draco Malfoy, Zach Smith and Elaine Rogers had all attended the University of Texas and developed a taste for Tex-Mex cooking. Draco and his wife always made gallons of his spicy and tasty chili. The other two made various other dishes, again in large quantities. There were usually real burritos, refried beans, rice, corn, enchiladas, tacos and other local foods.

There was a group that had attended Tulane University, which meant gumbo, jambalaya and blackened fish, among other cajun delights. A large group had been assigned in Washington D.C. and the surrounding area. They brought in crab, fish dishes and they usually did the chicken. There were a few who attended Harvard in Boston and that mean Clam Chowder, Lobster and other New England specialties. There was New York style and Chicago style pizza, steaks, corn on the cob, sour dough soup from San Francisco, all kinds of veggies, salads, fresh fruit and cakes and pies. For the kids, there was always hamburgers and hot dogs with American style "French Fries." The only departure from regional American food came from the Patil twins, who always brought food native to their parents' homeland of India, and Cho Chang who brought white rice and at least three different Chinese dishes.

Harry was debating whether he would offer the one hundred galleon prize for anyone who was able to eat a bit of everything. So far, only Rubeus Hagrid had succeeded. Still, it encouraged people to try new things and as most of the guests had never been to America and ate typical British food most of the time, it was well worth the encouragement.

The guest list included all the Weasley family except for Ginny. He had never invited her and was not about to start now. It also

included all Americans and most of the foreigners working at the Ministry for Magic and a fair few from the Ministry itself. All of the families from the Severus School in London also were invited every year. This was good for Teddy as it meant his friends would be there. The faculty at Hogwarts was always invited, although only Hagrid, Hedmistress McGonagall, Professors Sprout, Flitwick and Trelawney, Madam Pomphrey and now his Cousin Dudley and Neville Longbottom attended regularly. He also always invited his magical neighbors and those who knew about magic which included a fair number from St. Michael's Parish.

Another guest he always invited was Xenophilus Lovegood. He was an editor of a weekly that Harry trusted to tell the story strait and having him there made it hard to claim that he was barring the press. He always invited Luna Lovegood, but she had always been on expedition. Maybe this year, Harry thought.

So far, Harry had been blessed with perfect weather for his picnics. That meant games for children and adults alike. Hagrid always brought some rather tame magical creatures and set up a relatively safe petting zoo. There was also football, softball, quidditch, swimming in his lake, and horse back rides, to name only a few of the recreations he provided.

The picnic always started at ten in the morning and after the first year success, most all the guests now arrived within an hour of the start. While food was served throughout, the real eating began around four when the cooks completed their dishes. In Harry's case and the case of the other two "true" barbeque chefs, this was following almost twenty-four hours of smoking. After sunset, there was music and dancing for those inclined and campfires and roasting marshmallows and other treats for those not so inclined. It always culminated at midnight with a huge fireworks display courtesy of George Weasley.

Although this was only the third year of his picnic, it had already become an event and many families who had been before now planned their holiday around it. This year he had slightly over four hundred invitations that had been accepted and was expecting close to fourteen hundred guests, not including the guests he was bringing over from America for the "Surprise Wedding."

Harry now looked to his Wedding Checklist. He had a problem. The largest tent he could find would only sit about six hundred. But he had a solution. Including the list Hermione and her mother had provided, Harry selected three hundred who he felt had to be there. They would receive special tickets when they arrived at the Manor. The remainder of the tent seating would be handed out at random. The three hundred or so official guests would hold a reception on the Veranda while the rest of the picnic guests would dine on tables on the lawn as they had each of the prior years. Seating for the wedding would be set up so that everyone could attend, but most would be outside the tent itself. That way, Harry thought, everyone would be able to say they were there.

Aside from that glitch, aside from the final set up, the only thing Harry had left to do was get him and the men in his party fitted and to buy the women's dresses. He still did not know what they would be because Hermione had not told him yet, although he expected she would soon.

Harry then recalled a conversation with Draco the day before.

"It must be Granger," Draco said.

"Didn't believe me?" Harry asked.

"Well, no not really. But there's no doubt now."

"Why not?"

"Astoria has got most of the damn thing set up! Most women dither about that according to my wife. They can't decide on anything. But this Janie? All that's left are the dresses and the only reason that's not done is because she wants her bridesmaids' input. That reeks of Granger."

"Indeed it does," Harry agreed. "You have any idea how much easier this is for me than the last time? I've not been asked my opinion once and therefore never had to offer the wrong one."

Draco laughed. "Lucky bastard!"

"Last time, every little detail required my input and every time I gave it, I was wrong! This way's much easier. I just hope I can convince Hermione No Chicken Dance! Or at least, I Don't Have To Do It!"

"Good luck on that one."

His list of "to do" items was rapidly getting short. He still needed the rings, and most importantly Hermione's engagement ring. But he had that one sorted already. It was after he married Ginny that he learned of the full contents of his Estate and included in that was his mother's engagement ring. Ginny had never seen it nor worn it, so Hermione might find it acceptable. It was not the traditional diamond ring. Rather it had a huge, deep blue sapphire. He also had to plan his proposal, although that was far easier than the wedding itself. Arguably, it would also be harder to execute, he thought.

Harry heard the phone ring and heard Teddy call out that he got it. Harry returned to his lists and knew he had one more to make. He needed to plan the days from Hermione and her family's arrival until the wedding. The only events he had down were the arrival of her guests the Wednesday evening before the wedding, the rehearsal on Friday with a dinner for the Wedding Party, and the Wedding itself. He had days to fill with activities to keep them all occupied and to allow Teddy to begin to adjust to a new life. He also had to somehow slip a few days in for a true Honeymoon. He knew he had to be in St. Louis by August 6th which was the day Hermione had tickets to see the Cardinals play the Brewers. He also felt he should be with Hermione and the kids for his birthday on July 31st, so any Honeymoon had to fit into the interim. He also had to figure out where to take her. He wanted to take her somewhere she had never been before. Then he remembered a conversation from New York. She had never been to Rome!

Then another thought hit him. There was a name, a name that was not on the list of guests Hermione had suggested. Harry pulled Hermione's letters and read the ones from Sidney. Amanda O'Hare, he read. She was Hermione's flat mate and first true friend after she left Britain and she was not on the guest list Hermione had submitted. Yet, from her later letters, Harry knew Amanda was still in contact. They e-mailed each other at least once a week. Harry looked at his watch and knew what time it was in Sidney. He pulled out his cell phone and dialed a number he knew by heart.

"Chief Inspector Fanning," the clearly Australian accented voice on the other end answered.

"Hey, Mick! Harry Potter here."

Crickey! You ain't got another one of 'em Death Eater blokes on the loose, do ya?"

"Nah," Harry said, "just a personal favor to ask and an invite."

"Right. Invite to what?"

"My wedding."

"Bloody hell! You're getting hitched? When? Where? Who's the Sheila?"

"When is the 29th of this month. Where is a place I own near Oxford here in Pommy Land. And the Sheila is the bird I told you about."

"You found her?"

"Ran into her, more like. Got sent to a bloody conference in New York and there she was."

"And the spark's still there?"

"Never left."

"And she?"

"Learned she's been carrying a torch for me all these years as well."

"You lucky bastard!"

"Anyway, you and Maggie and the kids are invited, if you want, Mick."

"Bloody would love to, Mate, but travel ain't cheap."

"All expenses paid and I can throw in a one week tour package following. Course it's limited to the British Isles, but..."

"Ireland?"

"Got a whole week package just for the Emerald Isle!"

"Need to talk with me better half, but count me as a definite maybe! Now what's this favor?"

"My betrothed spent some time down under. While she was there, she shared a flat with a Sheila named Amanda O'Hare in Sydney for a time. They've kept in touch, but she's not on the list of invites I've got. So..."

"When was this?"

"Back in '99."

"Bugger! That may be my Cousin Amanda! Your betrothed say if this Amanda was at university?"

"She was and was planning to volunteer for the Sydney games."

"It may well have been her," Mick said. "Mandy is married now and living in Melbourne. Name's Cochran now. Tell you what. I'll give her a ring and if she's home give you her number."

"I'd appreciate it."

"Can I tell her about this?"

"Feel free. And by the way, she knew my wife-to-be as Janie Granger."

"Got ya. Any other dirty secrets I or she should know?"

"None I wish made public."

"And she will go off there Scot free as well?"

"Anyone crossing the pond I'm paying for."

"You are a gentleman and a scholar, Sir."

"Just don't tell anyone that, Mick. It'd ruin my reputation!"

Mick laughed. "Give me a few and I'll get back to you, Harry."

"Thanks Mick. This works out, it'll mean a lot to her and therefore to me."

"Got your back, Mate!"

"As always, Mick. In a few."

"Later!"

Only moments after Harry hung up the phone, his adopted son Teddy came bouncing into the room.

"Dad? Darla asked me to tell you that breakfast is ready."

Harry bounded out of his seat on the couch and practically ran to his son, picking him up and setting the sandy haired bough to laughter. "Oh, she did, did she?"

"Yeah," Teddy laughed as he was carried down into the basement where the kitchen was located. Harry placed his son into a chair and took his own seat across from him as the young House Elf Darla, dressed in a light blue dress, began levitating plates heaped with buttered toast, scrambled eggs, grits and bacon strips; a breakfast Harry and his son had taken to when they lived in Atlanta. On weekends, they had pancakes and maple syrup as well. Harry had a cup of coffee before him, Teddy a glass of milk and both of them a glass of orange juice.

Harry watched his son eat breakfast.

"I've taken the day off," Harry said.

His son looked up at him. "You have?"

Harry nodded.

"Why?"

"Can't I spend a day with my son?"

"Really?"

"Yup!"

"Yay!"

"So, what do you want to do with your old man?"

"Donno. Can I think about it?"

"Sure."

"Kay!" The boy was clearly thinking about something, Harry noted.
"Um Dad?"

"Yeah Ted?"

"Um, when are they coming?"

"When are who coming?"

"Duh! Janie and all the others!"

"Two weeks from tomorrow."

"Oh. Where will they be staying?"

"With us of course. Is that okay with you?"

Teddy nodded. "But they're moving here, right?"

"Right."

"And they probably have furniture and stuff and we have furniture and stuff. What rooms will they be in? What if there's not enough room for their stuff? What if they don't like our stuff?"

"You know what? I hadn't even thought of that."

"You didn't?"

"Nope. You're a smart kid, Teddy."

"So what are we going to do?"

"I'll send her an e-mail."

"Why not call?"

"Because it's too early, Teddy."

"Dad, it's almost nine in the morning!"

"Here, yes. Where they are it's almost three in the morning, it's still nighttime and they are still asleep."

"Oh. It's not the same time everywhere?"

"It is and it is not. There something called Universal Time. We are on that as it is based upon the time in Greenwich, England. Computers run on it and it's the same everywhere. But then there's local time which is tied into sunrise and sunset to an extent. Janie and her family live thousands of miles to the west of us. Their local time is different because sun rise for them is several hours after sunrise for us."

"Why?"

"You know the Earth is shaped like a ball, right?"

"Everyone knows that, Dad!"

"Well, you know it spins?"

"Yeah."

"So, if it is sunrise where we are and they are on another part of the globe, it won't be sunrise there, yet."

"Oh,"

"Remember, that's why you and Daphne were born at the same time even though you were here and she was there."

"Oh hey. Sorry."

"Don't worry about it kiddo."

"You think they'll like me?"

"What's not to like?"

FRIDAY - JULY 7, 2006 - WEASLEY HOUSE, OTTERY ST. CATCHPOLE, DEVON, U.K.

It had been a long time since the Wealsey family had been comfortable financially. A little over two hundred years ago, they had been quite wealthy. Not as wealthy as families like the Potters or Longbottoms, but wealthy enough to travel in the "right" circles. Unfortunately, the Estate passed to a notorious and reckless gambler who had never won a simple wager. Over his tenure as head of the family, the fortune was lost.

Despite accusations to the contrary, Arthur and Molly Weasley were never really poor. They were of modest means and with such a large family they had learned to be frugal. True, their children seldom owned a new set of clothes or new books, but they got by. After all, there were seven children in the family. For Arthur and Molly, it had always been about the children.

There were many families - mostly pureblood aristocrats - who in addition to deriding them for their 'poverty' also were convinced that Molly was a greedy, conniving witch. It was true that Molly would not act as a social inferior to 'those infernal people' as she called them, but nothing was further from the truth. She was proud of who she was and could care less about Manors and such. She tried to instill in all her children that family meant more than money. It always had for her.

She had given birth to eight children. Bill was the oldest and now worked as an Accounts Manager with Gringotts Bank, although he worked at their "front" bank in the Muggle economy. Charlie was next and had just left his job at a dragon preserve in Romania. He was returning to Britain to take up a position as the Professor of Care of Magical Creatures at Hogwarts as Hagrid was now busy with his zoo. Ellen had died as a toddler in an outbreak of Dragon Pox. Of all the Wealsey children, only Bill knew of her. Percy worked at the Ministry and was moving up in the new Foreign Office. Fred and George were twins. They had dropped out of school and

opened a successful joke shop. Fred died in combat during the War. George had continued the business and had become the largest Defense Contractor in magical Europe as a result, although his pride and joy remained the chain of joke shops.

The youngest two had given Molly fits as young adults. Ron had so much potential, yet such a bad attitude. Thank Merlin he married Lavender, Molly thought day after day. It was not pretty at first, but Lav had found the real Ron in time. Ron was now very wealthy just like his brother George. Ron went into retail and owned the largest chain of magical department stores in the world in a company he built up from nothing. What amazed Molly was despite their wealth, both George and Ron lived modestly (although Ron's sports car was a bit much, in Molly's opinion).

George and Ron had built Weasley House as an anniversary present for their parents. It was huge. It was designed so that Molly could easily have all her children, their spouses and their families stay there with room to spare. After all, despite some fall outs, she still considered Harry as a surrogate son. Molly had protested the gift, but Ron and George wore her down and now she was pleased they had. She could have her entire family under one roof, grandkids and all, something that the Burrow could never have done.

Ginny was the youngest. Technically she was the second daughter, but her older sister who died young was never mentioned. Molly had not seen Ginny since Ginny's marriage to Harry had ended. Molly had stood by her daughter in the run up to the hearing and was convinced Ginny was the victim. The hearing had gone bad for her little girl almost from the start. At one point, Ginny's solicitor requested a recess to confer with his client and Molly attended. The lawyer was telling her daughter to give it up! Ginny had insisted that Harry was cheating on her and demanding that the lawyer tell the court that.

It was then that Molly learned her darling little girl was anything but. The lawyer reached into a file and began tossing photographs at Ginny. Each one was of Ginny involved in one kind of sex act or another. Each one was with a different person or persons, mostly men, but some women as well. There were over one hundred and no two had the same partner. The lawyer said her daughter was famous in the Muggle World as her sex acts were all over something

called the Internet and he asked whether Ginny was receiving compensation for her displays which were seen around the world.

Molly stormed out of that meeting and had not seen her daughter since that day over three years ago. Where had she gone wrong?

"Mistress?" a voice called.

Molly looked up from the book she was reading. It was Ron's wife's most recent work. Lavender was a popular author of childrens' books. "Yes Aggie?" she said to the House Elf.

"There is a Miss Ginerva Weasley in the Salon who would like to speak with you."

THREE YEARS! Molly thought. That little slut has not shown her face within our family for three years! What in Merlin's name does she want? But Molly was a mother and would at least hear her embarrassment of a prodigal daughter out. She rose and walked to the Salon.

She entered the Salon and saw a young, red haired woman she knew was her daughter. She tried to keep her temper under control. "Why are you here?"

"Oh Mum!" Ginny said seeing her mother for the first time in years. "It's horrible! Harry's got a girlfriend and we can't have that now, can we?"

"Why can't we?" Molly hissed.

"Cause it was our plan that I was to be his wife and..."

"OUR PLAN? I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE ON ABOUT!"

"Come off it! You've been grooming me since I could talk. You told me of him and stories about him so I could be his wife!"

"I DID NO SUCH THING!"

"You read me bedtime stories..."

"BECAUSE YOU LIKED THEM! Yes, I will admit when you two got together, I was happy. But I was happy because you seemed to be, not because I wanted you to be. Now what do you want?"

"You didn't want us to be together?"

"I didn't say that! I didn't mean that! I meant I wanted you to be with someone whom you loved and who loved you back. That's it! I could care less who it was, mostly. Now why are you here?"

"I want him back!"

"It's obvious he does not want you! I'm not sure he ever really did! I heard about your potions, the one's you bought in Knockturn Alley! HOW COULD YOU?"

"It was meant to be!"

"And you deny him children?"

"MOTHER! I HAVE A CAREER!"

"AND YOU HAVE SHAGGED YOUR WAY TO THE TOP! I WOULD NOT BE AT ALL SURPRISED TO LEARN YOU ONLY MADE YOUR TEAM ON YOUR BACK! GET OUT, YOU TART! YOU ARE NO DAUGHTER OF MINE!"

"Mummy?" came a voice filled with tears.

"YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO THE FAMILY! YOUR BROTHER RON GREW UP! YOU, IT SEEMS, NEVER BOTHERED."

"Why are you all against me?" a whimper came back.

"YOU'RE A WHORE! I DID NOT GIVE BIRTH TO YOU TO BE A COMMON WHORE! YOU HAVE NO MORALS, NO HONOR! HOW COULD YOU? ALL HARRY EVER WANTED WAS A FAMILY AND YOU DENY HIM THAT? HOW COULD YOU? HOW COULD YOU CHEAT ON HIM?"

"Mother?" a weak voice begged.

"GET OUT! YOU ARE NO DAUGHTER OF MINE! GET OUT!"

The younger woman left at a run and in tears.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FRIDAY - JULY 7, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

The phone rang at about seven in the morning. Thankfully, Harry had become an early riser over the years and was eating breakfast with Teddy at the time. Harry had a wireless phone system installed and usually had one of his walk around phones within arms length, along with his cell phone.

"Hello? Potter residence," he began.

"Is this really?" and excited female voice replied. Harry could tell from the accent she was Australian. "Oh My God? Is it really?"

"Who may I ask is calling?"

"Oh, I am sorry. How silly of me. I am Amanda Cochran. My cousin Mick gave me this number and said I should ring you up and, Oh My God! Is this really Harry Potter? The Harry Potter?"

"Regretfully, it is," Harry sighed. Fan girl. "I really don't like being The Harry Potter, mind you."

"Sorry, it's just that..."

"I get it all the time. But I'd rather be just Harry, if you don't mind."

"Of - of course. Anyway, Mick told me to give you a ring. Something about my friend Janie. Is she in some sort of trouble?" there was real concern in her voice Harry noted.

"Why would you think that?"

"Well," she huffed, "my cousin is pretty high up in Magical Law Enforcement here and you are the number two there. Naturally I assumed this is work related."

"It's not."

"Then why?"

"I was going to call you," Harry said, "you see, I am one of the people who is helping to arrange something for Janie and - well - we Arrangers want all of Janie's friends to be here for it and..."

"She's getting married!"

"She is."

"Oh My God, that's wonderful! Who's the lucky fella?"

"There are security issues involved..."

"Ah, that explains Law Enforcement's involvement."

Who am I to argue with that? Harry thought. Will make this easier.

"Ah, yes. Well, Janie's role in the last war ... um ... let's just say there are certain elements who might wish to cause her harm. And the groom is also an individual of interest, particularly with the local press and such. The couple wants to keep this out of the public eye and all so we are being rather cloak and dagger about it."

"Oh. She never really talked about that War."

"Few do. It was not a pleasant time to be alive."

"So, why are you wanting to speak with me?"

"To invite you to her Big Day, of course."

"Um ... where and when?" There was doubt and disappointment in her voice.

"July 29th," Harry replied. "It will be held at a Manor here in Britain. I'm sure she would love for you to attend."

"I'd love to but..."

"But?"

"Well, I have to check with my Husband and make arrangements for our kids and all. Even then, I am not sure if we can afford it. I'd really love to be there but..."

Harry chuckled. "I can assure you Mrs. Cochrane, the only complication is your schedule."

"What do you mean?"

"If you decide to attend, the invitation extends to your entire family. I will give you the phone number and e-mail address of our travel agent so you can work out a schedule. All travel expenses will be paid. If you'd like to make a holiday of it, we are also offering one to two week tour packages following the event for the British Isles, and now France as well. Seems some of our overseas guests have expressed an interest in making a right Holiday of it, so we are happy to accommodate. Our agent will send you the information on the post-event tour packages. To be honest, I am a little envious. They seem lovely."

"Oh my! I mean, that was about when we were planning to go on Holiday. Can you give me a minute? My husband just walked in."

"Take your time."

"What's going on Dad?" Teddy asked.

"Last of Hermione's friends," Harry replied covering the mouthpiece of the phone.

"Oh. They say they're coming?"

"They're talking about it."

"You think she'll like this?"

"I think so, Teddy. She's had a say in every detail except when it will happen. I think she'll love it, although..."

"Although?"

"Our Special Friends have expressed an interest in coming."

"That could be a problem."

"They'll be low key, but she will be shocked when she meets them."

"Why? They're very nice people."

"Yes, but she's never met them and ... well."

"Yeah. I've seen it."

"Hello?" a male voice said on the phone.

"Hello. Potter residence," Harry replied.

"Mandy's been saying that you're inviting us to a wedding in England, and a holiday package as such. What's this all about?"

"We want all of Janie's friends here is all. Makes her day that much more special, don't you think?" And Harry repeated what he told Amanda.

"Jason Cochrane," the man finally introduced himself. "And what do you mean by all expenses? What's the schedule? And no worries, mate, Mandy's on the line as well."

"Right then," Harry said. "You will be contacted by our travel agent regarding possible Holiday packages after the event. Here's the deal. Our Aussie friends will travel from there to Heathrow by portal at 8:00 in the evening your time on the 26th. That puts you into Heathrow at around 10:00 in the morning our time. You will be offered time adjustment potions to adjust to the time difference and then travel by bus from Heathrow, through a scenic tour of London and on to the Manor outside of Oxford. The rest of the day is your own. Our overseas guests will be staying at the Manor, and there will be a choice of day trips on Thursday and Friday.

"There will be a late brunch the next morning when you will meet Janie, her family and the prospective groom, as well as the guests from the States who will arrive the night before. Friday will be the rehearsal and dinner to follow. The big day is a huge event anyway. It will be a picnic with more food than you could possibly imagine. The wedding itself will be around noon with a receiving line to follow. The guests will then dine on an array of food choices cooked by some of our other guests and the groom himself. There will be games and such for adults and children alike. Around 7:30, the

reception proper will begin with dancing and such and last until around midnight.

"The next day, the Bride and Groom will attend a celebratory Mass at St. George's Catholic Church just down the road from the Manor which all guests are invited to attend, if you want. It will be followed by a brunch at the Manor before the happy couple heads off for their honeymoon. As for you, if you choose a tour package, you will set out not long after the brunch.

"Before you leave home, you will receive a bank card to cover those expenses we can't pay up front such as travel to your airport, film, daily needs stuff, souvenirs and such. It will have a limit and will activate the day you are scheduled to leave and expire one week after your return home. You are encouraged, but not required to use it all."

"And what is the limit?" Jason asked.

"Five Thousand Pounds."

"Bloody hell! That's a bloody fortune! And all guests get that?"

"Just the ones who cross the water to get here."

"Still!"

"The groom is both very wealthy and very generous and wants his Bride to have her perfect day. Call it an incentive to travel abroad and make her day the one dreams are made of."

"And gifts?" Amanda asked.

"Janie is registered at Piccadilly's," Harry replied. "Although for her, the occasional rare book works as well."

"They just opened one here a couple of months ago," Amanda noted.

"And we can bring our kids?" Jason asked.

"There will be hundreds here. So yes, it is practically expected," Harry replied.

"Jason please?" Amanda's voice pleaded. It was not really necessary.

"Send us the info," Jason said to Harry. "If it's right, we'll be there."

There was a squeal of joy that Harry figured had to have come from Hermione's old friend. Harry then told Jason the contact information and got the information from him as well. Hermione's guest list was now as complete as he or her Mum could make it. It was a good beginning to his day.

FRIDAY - JULY 7, 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY, CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Hermione returned home from work barely in time for dinner. The past week or more, ever since it was announced that her company would be opening a European Headquarters in London, had been hectic. She was taking the initial lead in getting ready for that move. She had already picked many of the employees who would be moving across the pond to open the office and many of them were her friends. Still, she would be hiring additional staff after the office was open. It was hard and tiring work but fortunately, there was only another week left before she would "shut down" and spend her final week preparing for her personal move to London.

She spent the dinner and the couple of hours afterwards with the children hearing about their day and indulging them in their new favorite activity: learning all they could about their new home and Harry. As usual, it was a struggle getting them to bed, but they eventually relented and after they had all drifted off to sleep, Hermione finally had time to talk with her mother.

"Realtor's going to be here tomorrow," Rose commented.

"Realtor?" Hermione asked. She had totally forgotten about the need to sell the house.

"Honestly," Rose laughed. "I know you've been busy with work, but surely you don't expect this house to sell itself? Even with magic it's not like we can take it with us."

"Sorry Mum," Hermione replied sheepishly. "Slipped my mind, really."

"That's why two heads are usually better than one," Rose laughed. "Anyway, I met with her a couple of days ago. We're lucky. We're in a good neighborhood with a good school district. She said it should sell quickly even in this market, although we'll probably be in Britain when it closes so I was thinking of using the Martin's as proxies. We trust them and they can stand in for us at closing."

Hermione nodded.

"Today was my last day," Rose said.

"It was?"

Rose nodded. "I decided that one of us needs to handle these things. Can't put it off until you're off work, you know. In addition to the house, we'll need to sell our cars as well."

"We could take them," Hermione offered. She liked her Mini.

"The steering wheels are on the wrong side for Britain."

"Sorry. Forgot. Work's been on my mind, you know."

"Two heads, remember?"

Hermione nodded.

"Let me worry about the house and stuff," Rose said. "You worry about your work. When you finally leave, hopefully all we'll have left to do is contact the movers and pack our stuff."

"Thanks Mum. And the wedding stuff?"

"Oddly enough, it's mostly done with. You and your proposed Bridesmaids need to get fitted. Harry and the others (aside from your son) already have been. Got an e-mail from his earlier. The proposed guest list is finalized and most have said they'll come if given enough notice..."

"How much?"

"Depends on when," Rose lied. "A month should do."

"And the arrangements?"

"Harry's Wedding Planner says a week is more than enough. Magic is a wonderful thing at times."

Hermione nodded in agreement.

"Basically, all that's really left is he must propose to you, you accept and the two of you set a date. After that, it's pretty much automatic. So much less stressful than it was for your father and me."

Hermione pondered that for a moment. "Mum?" she asked changing the topic. She was willing to accept that for now the yet to be scheduled wedding was on track.

"Yes Dear?"

"Um ... well ... have you given any thought as to what you're going to do after we move?"

"You mean like work?"

Hermione nodded.

"Well as a matter of fact I have. I know one thing. I have started three Dental Practices. True, I joined an ongoing one here, but I still had to find my own patients. Three times in a lifetime is enough."

"You don't want to be a Dentist?"

"It's not that. Starting a practice is hard work and I'm not getting any younger, Janie. I've been practicing for over twenty-five years and will turn fifty-two in a couple of months or so. Bit long in the tooth, as it were. Still, I would not say no to a part-time position if one came up."

"And what about the rest of your time?" Hermione asked.

"Funny you should bring that up."

"How so?"

"Well, as you know Harry and I have been e-mailing each other and this topic did come up. He's offered me a job with his Foundation and I am seriously considering it."

"Really? Doing what?"

"Orientation Counselor to begin with," Rose replied.

"Is that like the folks from Magical Child Services who 'counseled' us about raising a magical child and such?"

Rose nodded. "I have a unique perspective, I think. After all, I got the old British treatment with you, Sweetie. 'Hello. Magic is real. Your daughter's a witch and now she'll be going away to boarding school for magic for most of the next seven years. Have a nice day.' Your Dad and I so much preferred the Australian and American approach. They let you know early and rather than take you away, we could learn about and participate in that world."

Hermione nodded. With her, they learned she was magical less than two months before she headed off to Hogwarts. While it had been exhilarating for her at the time, she could now understand how confusing and heart wrenching it must have been for her parents. There was no way she would have been happy with that had she been a non-magical mother. Becoming a mother had changed her perspective on a lot of things and had convinced her that what had happened to her family and the way Magical Britain at the time approached her and her parents was just plain wrong.

"And it's not like I lack experience," Rose laughed. "You were eleven when we found out and we had spent years by then wondering what it was that made you so unique. You turned out alright in the end. And of course there's now Daphne and your two little ones. I think I could do well helping the first time families adjust to this world we now live in."

"I think you'll be great at it, Mum."

"Pays not great, but the hours are better than my previous career."

Hermione laughed. "You and I both know money is a non-issue."

"There is that," Rose admitted. "Honestly, I am so proud of all of you. You are equally comfortable in both worlds and so smart. It's been a joy, really."

"Thanks Mum."

"It's actually kind of exciting," Rose went on. "Of course, I will be accompanied by a real witch or wizard on initial visits. Proving magic is real is not something I can do. But Harry believes it is best to have a non-magical there on the first visit to help the family learn that magic is not 'abnormal' really. And I so want to help people like your father and me come to grips with their young ones gifts."

"And it's not just initial visits. The foundation supports many programs to help new parents in raising the magical child. Harry told me that many young magical couples attend those programs as well. Can't have too much help learning to raise a child, can you?"

"I could never have coped as well without your help Mum."

"And you have two wonderful children to show for it."

"Thanks."

"Harry called it building a community," Rose went on. "Britain is not yet on par with America or Australia. Those countries magicals were either native and integrated into their societies for thousands of years or immigrants who left Europe because of both the non-magical and Pureblood oppression. Hence, their system is ingrained into their culture. But Harry believes that through this program and by integrating non-magicals early, we build a community that can withstand the remaining prejudices in the society. The work may take a generation to achieve it's aims, but I think it's exciting to be a part of a revolution, don't you?"

Hermione rolled her eyes in jest. "You forget, I was a proponent of House Elf rights even before the War."

"I most certainly have not forgotten!" Rose replied in mock horror.

"Just taking the mickie," Hermione laughed.

"Hermione Jane! How dare you tease your own Mum!" Rose laughed back.

SATURDAY - JULY 8, 2006 - WEASLEY HOUSE, OTTERY ST. CATCHPOLE, DEVON, U.K.

Ron and Lavender walked the final hundred meters to his parents' home. Ron carried his three year old daughter Roselyn, affectionately known as Rosie and Lavender their one year old son Artie. Their two oldest, five year old Molly and seven year old Gabbie walked at their side. They had gone to Chicago as planned, but a message from Harry changed their summer plans. Rather than head off to Disney World immediately following, they delayed and would head to Orlando in August. Harry had told them of his plans, with the proviso they keep it secret, even from Hermione. While they would have been back from Holiday when Harry's picnic was set, they both were enjoying the tasks Harry had asked of them for now.

So they decided it was high time to visit Ron's folks. They did every summer as often as they could. Molly loved all her grandchildren and Ron got a bit of a kick about how she let them get away with anything. Must be making up for all the rages she had with her own children when they were the same ages. Molly, of course, said that being parents was different than being Grandparents. As the Gran, it was her job to spoil the little ones rotten and leave it to the parents to deal with the aftermath. Ron found it amusing, mainly because Lavender's parents were the same way and so different than they had been with her she said.

The three older ones soon scampered off to play out back with some other Weasley grandchildren who were also visiting. Although Ron still had issues with "Pompous Percy," their kids got along. He and his wife, still carrying little Artie, entered the kitchen to the smells of whatever his Mum was cooking. She always seemed to be cooking something and now that she was in an "empty nest" one would think that might have changed. But Ron knew with grandkids visiting throughout the summer, Molly was her old self, fussing about their weight and making sure they were stuffed to the gills. Not that Ron minded. His wife bent over backwards to watch his weight, which meant that while he ate, it was not like before he was married where he was allowed to shovel down helping after helping. That only happened now at his parents' place, which was one of many reasons he returned whenever his busy schedule allowed.

"Ronald?" his mother cried as he and Lavender entered the home. "Lavender! Oh my. I didn't know you were coming! I hope I have enough for you, Ron - and of course you Lavender. You're eating for two, you know and I don't like you weight."

"The Healer says its fine," Lavender said rolling her eyes. It was always the same with her Mother-In-Law. No one's weight was right. They were always too thin.

"Yes, yes," Molly said dismissively - as usual. "So where are Gabbie, Molly and Rosie?"

"Out back, Mum" Ron said.

"Too good to see their Gran?"

"Too interested in playing," Ron laughed. "They'll be in when they're hungry. They know there'll be plenty to eat."

"I swear none of you lot feed your kids proper," Molly chuckled.

Even Ron rolled his eyes at that one.

"So, Ron," Molly drawled, "you were in New York. Any truth to this story that Harry as a new girlfriend?"

"New York's even larger than London, Mum," Ron stalled.

"I suppose it is," she sighed. "Any news at all?"

"As a matter of fact yes," Ron replied.

"Oh?" Molly's curiosity was piqued.

"Lav saw her Healer this week and we now know what we are having," Ron replied brightly.

"Oh?" It was clear that while Molly was interested in this news, it was not the news she was interested in. "Boy or girl?"

"Erm - well we didn't ask."

"You said you knew!"

"Yeah, well..."

"Well what?"

"Twins," Ron said! "We're having twins! We didn't ask what kind as long as they were healthy, we don't want to know until we see them."

"Merlin's Beard! Really?"

Ron nodded.

"You think you can handle twins?"

"Did you, Mum?"

"Erm - well - ah ... Had I known Fred and George before, I'd say no."

"Having known Fred and George, we think we'll manage," Ron laughed. "Goodness knows it'll make life interesting."

"And just what do you think, Lavender," Molly said sweetly, although her sincerity was lacking.

"Given those two, we think we can manage," she said. "Doubt these two can be worse," she added rubbing her now beginning to show belly. "Those two are a hard act to follow."

"Indeed," Molly replied. The truth was Molly admired Lavender. She just was stubborn in admitting it to anyone other than her husband. However, try as she might her attempts at being distant failed as it was clear Lavender had grown into one of her favorite Daughters-In-Law over the years. Anyone who could turn her Ronny around was special, Molly had long thought.

"So neither of you know anything about this Janie person our Harry's supposedly smitten about?" Molly asked.

"We never said that," Lavender replied softly. "We did meet her - and him. Ronny merely said New York's a big city and I agree and more important, we are not here to talk about Harry's love life."

"I understand," Molly replied, although it was clear she was being patronizing. "Still, he is like family and I wouldn't want him to be seeing..."

"Another Ginny," Ron growled cutting her off.

"What? She's your sister!" Despite what had recently come to pass between Molly and her daughter, deep down she wanted all of her children to be a part of her life and to get along. It had always pained her when they did not and it still hurt even now that they were all grown up and with lives and families of their own.

"That slut makes me at my worst look celibate, Mum, and you know it!" Ron shot back. "If half the stories are true, she'd make more money on her back - or face - than on the Quidditch Pitch! At least I grew up eventually! She's been a tart since before she and Harry married and you know it! I don't know why you stick up for that 'bats both ways' slag!"

"She's your sister!" Molly protested.

"She's a whore without the income!"

"And this Janie?"

"Is a right decent woman, Mum. She's not into Harry for his fame or money. She needs nor wants neither. She is independently successful. Not nearly as wealthy, but she's not after Harry for money. And she is willing to have children. Something your daughter deems beneath her! You will not bad mouth Harry or his Janie in front of me. Janie will do what Ginny never did! She loves Harry and not the fucking Boy-Who-Lived! She will make him happy at her cost as opposed to assume he owes her anything! She could care less about his money or property or any of that!"

"Ronald, I just want what is best for Harry," Molly protested.

"And that was Ginny once, wasn't it?" Ron shot back. "She's shagged most every unattached male and many females of such disposition in Britain! From what I heard, she may have been sleeping around before Harry left for America! She certainly was

after and has not stopped! AND SHE REFUSED TO GIVE HIM THE ONE THING HE HAS ALWAYS WANTED: A FAMILY!"

"Ron," Molly began.

"NO! You will ask no more questions about her! None!"

"Lavender?"

"I'm with Ron on this one," Lavender replied. "Janie is off limits."

"And what shall I tell your sister, Ron?"

"She's a slag," Ron said. "Although I thinks she prefers blokes, you should see the on-line videos! Bloody disgusting! She doesn't seem to care about the plumbing, if you catch my meaning! Tell her to start charging for her services 'cause she can't play Quidditch all her life! Tell her to grow the fuck up!"

"RONALD WEASLEY!"

"Don't give me that, Mum! You know as well as I do that's true."

Molly was on the verge of tears. Ron was right about his little sister and she knew it but could not do anything about it.

"Janie's off limits," Ron added.

Molly could only nod. When the hell did he grow up, she wondered. "You were the last one on her side when Harry left her," she added softly.

"Cause I was stupid," Ron shot back. "She stood by me when I cheated on Hermione, and Lavender for that matter. She stood by me when I got fired from the Aurors for screwing around. She stood by me when I broke every heart that mattered and lost every friend that mattered. And she makes me look good! You know what happened after Harry won his case against her? After I was the only person in her corner?"

Molly shook her head.

"Weeks later she called my wife a loser. MY WIFE! The one person who never gave up on me! The one person who stood with me even when anyone else would have left! The person who's brilliance is WHY I became successful! The person who, despite being my main financial advisor and the mother of my children and now a best selling author of children's stories, stood by ME when no one else would and made me the man I am today!"

"Thanks Love," Lavender said.

"It's true," Ron replied. He then looked at his mother. "Keep that slag of a sister of mine away from me and Harry. She bought her cake, now she can eat eat - the fucking little whore!"

"Ron," Molly began meekly.

"The 'Janie' we met in New York is a truly special person," Ron shot back. "She will be everything Harry wants. Everything. Everything my so called sister was not! She's off limits! I will not say anything more about her! Lav?"

"Ronny's right," Lavender replied. "She's not the topic for idle gossip."

Molly could only nod in reply. She had long ago lost the only daughter in the Weasley line due to her own misguided sense of who her children should marry. Ron had his perfect wife now, admittedly not the one Molly would have chosen. But she had to admit to herself, only Lavender could have found his potential and made it grow. Her first choice would not have. Ginny, on the other hand, was every bit as messed up as Ron had said. She was the most self centered person Molly had ever known and Molly seriously had wondered for years where she had gone wrong with her only daughter.

"I understand," she said. It was a surrender and not something Molly Weasley was very familiar with in life.

"So you did see Harry at this thing, right?" Molly asked.

"It was awkward at first," Ron said not answering directly. "I mean I really messed things up with him back then. But yeah, we did. It was actually a really pleasant time." Ron and Lavender then told Molly

about their week in New York with Harry and Janie's family. Molly learned that Janie had two children of her own and a little sister. What she did not learn was who Janie really was and who the father of the twins was. Still, Molly was pleased that Harry seemed to be doing well and might well be on the road to a decent relationship and marriage and even more pleased that it seemed that Harry and Ron were mending their fences, although she agreed with Ron that they would never be as they once were.

"But you are talking to Harry these days, right?" Molly asked.

Ron nodded.

"Good. I see Harry often enough but ... well it wouldn't feel right..."

"Mum, what are you on about?" Ron asked.

"Ginny came by recently."

"Oh?"

"I hadn't seen or heard from her since her marriage ended. I was hoping..." Molly said with pain in her voice, "I was hoping she - she wanted to come back to her family. "Percy did! He eventually did."

"His still a bit of a prat," Ron mumbled.

"But he came back, right?"

Ron nodded.

"I had so hoped Ginny was coming back..."

"I take it she was not?"

Molly shook her head. "She only came to see me because she wanted my help with something."

"What?" Ron and Lavender asked.

"Getting Harry back."

"NO!"

Molly nodded.

"And what did you do?" Ron asked.

"We had words, is what. I wouldn't set her up with Harry under any circumstances that I can see. She then left when she knew she was not going to get me to do what she wanted."

"Spoiled brat."

"I wonder to this day what I did wrong with her," Molly sighed. "Even after what happened between you and Hermione and all that, you never abandoned your family, Ron."

Ron nodded. The night after he brought his Mum to try and help him patch things up with Hermione he had been the victim of what was now known in family lore as the Rant of the Century. Molly had yelled at him for over four hours straight and only stopped when she lost her voice. Still, he never walked out on her or any of his family not named Ginny. And that would come years later.

"So ..." Ron began.

"You or Lavender should let Harry know the tramp is up to something and whatever it is, it's not nice."

Ron nodded. "We'll do that, Mum."

WEDNESDAY - JULY 12, 2006 - THE BURROW, OTTERY ST. CATCHPOLE, DEVON, U.K.

Ginny had had a wonderful night last night at a party with some Muggle Rugby players. She really did not know how many, nor did she care. They had kept her quite entertained, particularly between her legs, which is where she preferred it. Nights like last night made her feel invincible for some reason, which was why she chose this day off to talk to her mother about getting her Harry back. She had it all planned. Get Harry, dose him with potions and she could have his fame and fortune and continue to party all the time. It was perfect, but she needed her mother to make it work so she was off home to enlist her mother's help. After all, who could refuse her? She was Ginny Weasley after all! And her mother had been but an exam

away from becoming a potions Mistress when she became pregnant with her first child and had to stop for fear of possible complication. Yet another reason not to get pregnant, Ginny thought.

Ginny Weasley was the youngest of seven children and the only girl. That made her special. She knew if she ever had a child, her special place would end, which was why she denied Harry that. She could not understand why he thought that was such a big deal. It didn't matter. She had dosed him before. It would work again. But she needed her Mum.

True, Mum had not helped her the last time. That was Cho's doing. Cho wanted Harry to pay for being such a git and getting him together with Ginny seemed like a real payback. And for Cho, all Ginny had to do was shag her a few times now and then. For Ginny, even though she was not into girls, it seemed like a small price to pay to become Mrs. Rich and Famous. It was just a shag after all. And by her Fifth Year, Ginny was quietly known as She-Shags-a Lot, meaning partners as well.

"Hello?" she asked as she stepped out of the fireplace.

There was no answer in the house.

"HELLO?"

The silence was deafening. She was shocked. Throughout most of her life, her mother was always at home. Odd that. Then again, she had not been back home in over three years. Not since her marriage ended.

"HELLO!"

It figures, Ginny thought. My last day off for the next several weeks because of this year's World Cup and they choose this day to be somewhere else! I won't be back until mid-August and there's no time to waste on whatever they're doing! I need them NOW!

She flopped onto the couch with a childish pout on her face and waited. And she waited and waited for another three hours before anyone arrived.

"Who are you?" a strange looking older man said entering Ginny's family home.

"Who are you?" she shot back. "What are you doing in my family's house?"

"Madge, call the cops," the man said over his shoulder. He then turned to Ginny. "Your house? My wife and I have lived here for over two years!"

"Wha?"

"You heard me, you nut case! We bought this place over two years ago. Now who the hell are you?"

"I - er - I grew up here."

"You did, did you? Well, you're not child of ours! How'd you get in?"

"Floo."

"Really?"

"Special family code," Ginny said. It was true. There was one that had been installed back during the war.

"Really? Still, I want you out of here or I'll do you for trespass!"

Ginny looked around and realized that something was indeed wrong. She now recognized nothing. It was the Burrow, that much was obvious. But the furniture was all wrong. What was going on?

"Where - where are the previous owners?" she asked.

"Don't bloody care!" the man said. "We rent this place and we never met them."

"But ... but ... but..."

"Been on the lamb or something, have you lassie?"

"What?"

"Cops after you? Two and a half years and more and you don't know where your family is? Sounds like you're a criminal on the run to me. Madge, where are the bloody cops?" the man cried.

"On the way," a woman's voice called.

She had no idea what was going on, but a night in a holding cell was certainly not on her agenda. Ginny dashed out back and apparated away. There were other avenues open to her. They would just take longer and most likely would have to wait until after the World Cup. September seemed like a good idea. That would give her time to find a sympathetic Weasley - there had to be one out there - and get her plan together to get Harry, and more importantly his fortune back. Goodness knows she needed it. Despite being the highest paid player in League history, she was nearly broke.

SATURDAY, JULY 15, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

The phone rang and Teddy soon picked it up. "Hello? Potter residence?"

"Hello," a strange man's voice replied. "My name is Ron. Is your father there?"

"Sure. Just a bit." Teddy then yelled out: "DAD, SOME MAN NAMED RON IS ON THE PHONE!"

A few moments later, Harry picked up the phone. "Ron?" he asked.

"Sorry to bother you, Harry," Ron said. "But I'm calling to give you a heads up. Ginny's out there."

"As I am acutely aware," Harry said.

"No, Harry," Ron countered, "I mean I think she's lost it! Gone 'round the twist."

"What are you talking about?"

"About ten days ago, she showed up at my parents' house in London to talk to Mum. Apparently Ginny wanted Mum's help in getting the two of you back together."

"You're right. She's mental. And what'd Molly do?"

"Blew up and kicked her out."

"Good for her," Harry chuckled.

"There's more, Harry."

"Oh?"

"Last Wednesday a woman matching her description was at the Burrow. Nearly got herself arrested."

"What was she doing there?"

"No idea, really. My guess is she never heard that George and I rented the place out not long after Mum and Dad moved to the new place. I guess she assumed one of us lived there. I know she heard me talking about it but..."

"You and Lav decided to buy in London," Harry finished. "And of course that happened after she dropped out of your lives."

"Yep. Just wanted to give you a head's up. No telling what the conniving bint is really up to."

"Thanks Ron." The conversation then turned to other subjects for several minutes until finally Harry and Ron hung up.

Harry was in his study at the time of the call. He walked over to the bookshelf and removed a thick ledger. Upon it was the title "WARD BOOK." He had purchased this book soon after the War and ended and he had decided to move into his Godfather's old home. It was an added security precaution that augmented the Fidelius Charm that hid the house from all but those people he deemed trustworthy. Once the charm was cast and he named himself Secret Keeper, ordinarily only those people he explicitly told about the House would know where it was and would be able to find it. The book added an additional level of security. In addition to being told by him, their names also had to be written in the book. The advantage this had was he could remove people without having to recast the spell each time.

There were quite literally hundreds of names in the book and only a handful were crossed out, including two of the first three names: Ginerva (Weasley) Potter and Ronald Weasley. The third name in the book had never been touched: Hermione Granger. Some of the Weasleys were crossed out as one moved through the ledger, but only Ron and Ginny had not been reinstated. Harry reached the end of the list and took out a pen adding some named to the Ledger: Rose Granger, Daphne Granger, Harry Granger, Luna Granger and finally Ronald Weasley. He then closed the book and returned it to its place on the shelf before leaving the study.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

MONDAY - JULY 17, 2006 - OFFICE OF HEALER SANDRA JOHANSON, CLAYTON, MO.

It was the Monday first week of what promised to be an extended holiday that would allow her to move her and her family from their home in St. Louis to her new home in London. Hermione had finished her work here this past Friday. This week would be dedicated to packing and getting moved out of the house where they had lived for over five years. It would be bittersweet in a way. Hermione had come to think of this place as home. After all, it is where her babies were born, where she finished school and went to university and where she worked and raised her two children. Still, with her Harry waiting at the other end of this journey, she should have been in a good mood. She was not. She had been sick all weekend and was pretty sure she knew why, but also had no idea why. Rather than suffer, she was at her Healer's office as soon as possible on Monday morning.

"So, Janie, what brings you in?" Healer Johanson asked.

"I think I'm pregnant," Hermione replied.

"Have you taken a home pregnancy test?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Most recently? Yesterday."

"And?"

"Negative."

"Then what makes you think it's wrong?"

"Everything is the same as last time," Hermione said. "When I became pregnant with the twins, I was under a lot of stress. I was traveling to Australia to find my parents and had no idea how long I'd be there or if I could even find them. A few weeks after I arrived, I knew I was late and bought one of those tests and it was negative

so I thought it was the stress. Then, I started experiencing heartburn. Never had that before. A few days later came the nausea. I went and saw a Healer in Sydney and found out I was pregnant."

"And this time?"

"I'm over a week late. I started experiencing heartburn again last Wednesday and the nausea on Friday which was when I booked this appointment."

"And yet the home test is negative?"

Hermione nodded.

"Well, let's check you out and see."

Fifteen minutes later, the Healer turned to Hermione after checking some readings she had taken with her wand. "Yep, you're expecting. Are congratulations in order?"

"I guess."

"You don't seem too happy. You afraid of what the father might say?"

"Oh, that's not it. We're going to get married probably in the next few months and he wants children. So do I. It's just that I don't understand how this happened."

"Janie, please tell me I don't have to tell a twenty-six year old with two children where they came from."

Hermione chuckled. "No. I am acutely aware of the mechanics. What I don't understand is this is the second time this has happened. The last time I was on the birth control potion. I had been on it for six years and never missed a dose. Despite that I got pregnant. Same this time. I was on the potion and it didn't work."

"Not every dose is effective. Might have been a bad batch. Surely you've had sex without getting pregnant."

"Actually, no. The first time I had sex, I wound up pregnant. The second time is why we are here today."

"You've only had sex twice?" the Healer asked in disbelief.

"Well, no. The first time he and I spent three days together. This last time it was about a week. Aside from those two times, I have not been sexually active at all."

"Interesting," the Healer nodded. "Was it the same man each time?"

"Yes," Hermione said. "Is that important?"

"Might be. Were you in love with him the first time?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Yes."

"How long had you two been together before you first became intimate?"

"You mean as a couple?"

"Friends, couple. How long had you been emotionally close?"

"We had been best friends almost eight years. I'd say emotionally we were close most of that time. Why?"

The Healer ignored the question. "That first time, was there a part of you willing to bear his children?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Most definitely, why?"

"It's a possibility," the Healer said more to herself than to Hermione.

"What is?"

"Janie, I need to run some tests, okay?"

"Why?"

"You might have what's called Eros Syndrome. It's not likely. It's very rare, but your history indicates that possibility."

"Is it bad?"

"Depends upon your point of view, really. It's only bad if you don't want to get pregnant. But we'll discuss it if I confirm that you have the condition."

"Will it hurt my baby?"

"No Janie. If anything it actually helps them. Now up on the table. I need to draw some of your blood for this and I regret I won't have the results until Wednesday. Okay?"

"I - I guess."

"Relax, Janie. There is nothing to be afraid of."

"Easy for you to say. I've never heard of Eros Syndrome."

"It's not necessarily a bad thing, but we'll discuss it when the results are in."

"And if I don't have this Syndrome?"

"Then you have incredibly bad luck with your potions," the Healer chuckled. "Oh, did you buy them or make them yourself?"

"When I was in school, I got them from the Healer. Since then I buy them from the Apothecary. Why?"

"Some witches make their own potions. It's not advisable because the potion is very sensitive during the brewing process. A little mistake, one that cannot be detected, and the potion is about as effective at preventing pregnancy as drinking milk as in not at all."

MONDAY - 17 JULY 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY, CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Hermione lay in bed that night wide awake. Pregnant? Again? Part of her did not mind that much, although she hated this stage of her last pregnancy. Food never tastes better the second time around. But what was she going to tell Harry? How? When?

She knew the answers. She would tell him the truth. She was certain he would not really mind this change. One thing was for certain, though. It had to be as soon as possible and in person. He deserved that much. She decided to tell him as soon as she could get him alone.

And her mother? Hermione hoped she would not catch on to her condition before she had a chance to tell Harry. However, if asked she was not going to hide things.

What really concerned her was the timing. She and Harry had talked about a possible wedding sometime around Christmas or later, but that was before she knew for certain that she was moving to London in only what was now a matter of days. She would have to hope he would agree to move up the date, preferably sometime this summer. She only had a couple of months at best where she could walk down the aisle and not advertise her condition to the world. Would he understand?

She really didn't want to get married with a big baby belly. That was not why she was marrying him. Well it was. They did want children. But she did not want anyone to think they were marrying because she was pregnant. They were marrying because they were in love.

She knew she was going to get another "cart before the horse" lecture from her Mum when she found out. Oh well. Bit late, she chuckled at her bad pun.

WEDNESDAY - JULY 19, 2006 - SHELL COTTAGE, SOMEWHERE ON THE COAST OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND.

Ever since she had gotten the note from Cho, Ginny Weasley had felt as if things were slipping and falling apart. Harry, her Harry, was serious about another woman. Not just any other woman, but an American. She had always thought that Harry would someday see the error of his ways and come back to her, but he never had. And now this?

She needed to get him back. They were meant to be together. That's what she had known since she was five and she had thought her mother knew that too. Besides, an American? Britain's most eligible bachelor and the biggest hero in ages with an American? It was her patriotic duty to put an end to that and she was certain that duty would get her family to back her to the hilt. She needed him back, after all. She needed that money.

Her dad was not an option. He had made his mind up years ago and had actually not listened to her Mum for the first time she could remember. Dad had given up on Ginny the day Ginny decided to put Quidditch above "her family." Didn't Daddy know she was a Weasley? That was her family. But he had made it clear, she stopped being a Weasley the day she married Harry. Ginny took it as being practically disowned, although her Dad tried to explain to her that was not it at all. Harry was her husband and she was a Potter now. Ginny thought that was silly. The rift never mended and only got worse over time. She knew Daddy would not help her.

Her brother Percy was also out. She had never truly forgave him for his blind support of the Ministry and the Death Eater supporting or ignoring cronies that had filled key office during the War. She had only seen him on occasion since. She did not know where he lived and did not even know what office he worked in these days. She knew he married, but never met his wife and, to be honest, cared not to. Percy's wife had been Head Girl Ginny's third year and had docked Ginny points and placed her in detention for snogging with Michael Corner in a broom closet. Ginny didn't see the big deal. So what if she was topless and they each had their hands down each other's pants? It's not like the door was open or they were breaking curfew at the time.

Charlie was also out. But that had more to do with Geography seeing as he had lived in Romania for years. Ginny had never learned Charlie had moved back to Britain.

Two weeks ago, she had begun with her brother George. Three years ago, George lived over his first store in Diagon Alley. She had not heard he had moved, so she went there looking for him. He had moved. The clerks did not know where he lived but told him he might be found at the Corporate Headquarters for Weasley Industries in Central London. Ginny went there and was told that just because she was "family" did not mean she could show up without an

appointment to meet the head of the company. His next open space was for a half an hour on August 16 at 9:30 A.M. and then only for a half an hour. And no, they would not give her his home address!

That had led to the disastrous meeting with her Mum that evening. She was so sure her Mum would see the truth of it. She had barely begun her pitch when her mum started yelling and all but threw her out of the house.

Last week she had gone after Ron. Ron was the only one in her family who had not all but walked out of the hearing when it was revealed she did not want children. Ginny was sure he understood. After all that hussy Lavender had trapped him into a marriage he did not want and Ginny knew that. She had gone to his place of work as well and had gotten the same run around she had received when she tried to talk with George except that Ron had no appointments available until the end of August. So she went to where she thought Ron lived. When he and George bought her parents their new home, Ron made it clear he was going to move into the Burrow. That obviously had not happened as she found out to her dismay.

She was left with Bill Weasley or going straight to Harry himself. Harry was not going to happen. She would never get through security at his place of work and she did not know where he lived. True, she had lived there for over two years, but that damned Fidelius Charm. She knew he had removed her from his list. She could not remember where he lived other than that it was somewhere in London.

She did not even bother trying to see her oldest and favorite brother at work. She doubted he would have time for her either. So instead, she was now walking up the path to Shell Cottage. It was actually rather large for a cottage. It had two floors and six bedrooms and was located near a bluff overlooking the sea. Ginny could hear the sounds of children laughing and playing outback as she neared the door.

Bill's wife Fleur would not have been near the top of Ginny's list of potential confederates for winning Harry back. She was good friends with Harry, for one, and might not agree at all. Ginny had never liked her, for another. True, she liked Fleur more than Lavender or Percy's wife Penelope. Then again, she liked the smell of mud more than the smell of dung, and she never liked the smell of mud. Still,

Fleur had somehow wooed Bill into marriage without getting pregnant, which meant that she had talents. Then again, given Fleur's mother and grandmother, maybe that was easy for the French woman. And Fleur's being foreign would be another issue. Fleur may well be sympathetic with Harry's new woman for that reason if no other. That was easy enough. Just don't tell Fleur who she was interested in, Ginny thought to herself.

Ginny knocked on the door of Shell Cottage. She had to wait far longer for an answer than she wanted and was starting to get annoyed when the door opened revealing a tall, blonde haired woman with deep blue eyes with the figure and looks that most men would drool over and most women would envy, and that included Ginny. The woman was holding a small baby girl in her arms and was looking at Ginny with mild curiosity.

"Fleur?" Ginny asked.

"And who are you?" Fleur replied with a touch of hostility.

"Ginny. I'm Bill's sister, remember?"

"Indeed. What brings you here?" Fleur now sounded cold.

"Who's that?" Ginny asked trying to lighten the mood.

"Not zat you care, but zis is my youngest Colette. She 'as just been fed and I was to put her down for her nap. Again, Ginerva, after three years what are you doing here?"

"Sounds like there's a party out back," Ginny continued trying to get Fleur to relax even a little.

"Yes, well, as my sisters are in need of time for zemselves, I agreed to watch the family today. Victorie and Dominique are out back playing along wit Artimus, Rachel, Christine, Lance, Gabrielle, Molly, Roselyn and Teddy. Louis, my other baby Bill, Edward, Maggie and Artie are down for naps."

Ginny blinked uncomprehending.

"Victorie, Dominique, Louis, Colette and Bill are our children and ze rest are zose of your brudders Percy, Ron and you former Huzband

'Arry. Not zat you would know. No one 'as 'eard or seen from you in years. You are not family, just a stranger. Now what brings you 'ere?"

"Erm..." This was not going well.

"You disappear from us for years. Now you are back? Why? You abandon you family. Why?"

"And you have nor abandoned yours?" Ginny replied hoping to avoid another confrontation.

"I 'ave not. Bill and I visit zem often and they us. Just because I live here does not mean I ignore my family back in France."

Ginny snorted in disbelief.

"Now if you are 'ere about 'Arry, you might as well leave now," Fleur continued.

"What?" Ginny replied.

"I 'ave 'eard from your mudder. She says you 'ave been acting as if he is still yours and seem to be seeking vile 'elp to get 'im back. We will not offer such assistance."

"I..."

"Don't think we don't know who you are, Ginny," Fleur continued. "Quidditch aside, you 'ave become a disgrace to your own family. You are an embarrassment to women ... no an insult. Yes and insult."

"What do you mean?"

"Is zere any wizard you 'ave not slept with over ze past few years?"

"I..."

"Let me clarify. Any wizard who is not old, fat or ugly?"

"I don't have to ... ?"

"And we 'ave heard witches are not off your pitch eizer? And you want us to 'elp you wit 'Arry? I tink not. I would not 'elp you wit any man I know, even ze ones I cannot stand."

"But..."

"So do you 'ave any friends?"

"What? Of course I do!"

"Any you have not taken into your bed?"

"I ... sure," although Ginny was not as sure as she tried to sound.

"I see," Fleur replied with disgust in her voice. "Now please leave. I do not wish my daughters or nieces to meet a woman like you, Ginerva. Unlike you, I have dignity and zat is what I want for my children as well. Good day." And before Ginny could reply, the door closed in her face.

Stupid frog bint, Ginny thought. What does she know? I'm the best player in the league! Of course I have friends!

But she was no closer to getting Harry back than ever. Ginny turned around in a huff and headed back to her flat.

WEDNESDAY - JULY 19, 2006 - OFFICE OF HEALER SANDRA JOHANSON, CLAYTON, MO.

"Well?" Hermione asked.

"You have Eros Syndrome, Janie," Healer Johanson said without emotion.

"Is that bad?"

"Only if you want a small family."

"What do you mean? What is Eros Sydrome? How did I get it?"

"Eros Syndrome is a very rare genetic condition regarding a witch's magic."

"I was born with it?"

The Healer nodded. "However, even if you were, that does not mean it would ever have become active. It takes the confluence of several highly unlikely events to trigger the condition. First of all, you have to develop a very strong emotional bond with a man, a bond far beyond lust or even romantic love. Even then, it takes years for the condition to set in. Second, your magic and the man's magic must be in tune with one another, which is also exceedingly rare. Then there is physical proximity. You must spend months if not years in close daily proximity for the conditions to ripen, as it were. Even in most marriages, the couple seldom spends enough time together to trigger the condition. If all those conditions are met, the syndrome will cease being dormant."

"What to you mean by proximity? Intimacy?"

"No. There is a pheromone interaction that helps trigger the syndrome. You don't need close physical contact, just close enough that you react to his pheromones. And again, this close and near continual proximity takes years to have an effect."

"Such as, let's see," Hermione said, "sitting next to him three meals a day, in class, whenever we studied, most times when we were just hanging out for ten months a year for six years? How about living with him in a small tent for nine months or so? Spending a fair amount of my holidays in the same house as him?"

"That would do it."

"So what does this mean?"

"The syndrome basically means that your magic is particular attuned to bearing and raising his children. When activated and when you have intimate relations with the man in question, the odds of you not getting pregnant if you are ovulating or are near ovulating are slim to none provided you have not recently given birth. Magical birth control is useless and even the Pill won't work. The only methods of birth control that can be effective are either a physical barrier such as a condom or diaphragm or abstinence."

"So any sex will result in pregnancy?"

"Actually no. You still are otherwise normal. The increased probability of conception still requires ovulation and your cycle is not affected or enhanced in any way. Moreover, it is only with that one man that you are likely to get pregnant with no effort. Remember, it requires several preconditions and each one of them is hardly a common occurrence."

"So your saying that Harry and I are the reason? Having sex with him practically means I'm going to get pregnant if it's the right time of the month?"

"Unless you're still nursing, yes. Apparently nursing a baby dampens the condition such that your risk of pregnancy approaches a normal level. A couple of months after you stop breast feeding, your at risk again. And you will remain at risk so long as you're with that man and until you hit menopause.

"If you do love him, what this means is you are likely to have a large family. You are also more than five times as likely to bare fraternal twins."

Hermione nodded. "I already have," she said to herself.

"The good news is that your children will be far healthier than average, are far less likely to have any birth defects and are more magical than otherwise would be the case. Also, pregnancy and delivery will be easier for you than might otherwise be the case."

"So basically all this means is it is easier for me to get pregnant with Harry?"

"Basically."

"He wants kids. He might not want a dozen, but he wants kids as in more than one. I guess this is not so bad."

"What about you, Janie? What do you want?"

"I was raised an only child as was he. We both want more children. It just seems we may wind up having more than either of us thought."

"You'll need to talk with him."

"I know. Are you sure it's this Eros Syndrome? Is it possible we are magically bonded?"

"You mean like those silly romance novels?"

Hermione shrugged.

"Well, if you're hoping for a perfect relationship requiring no effort on either of your parts, or to be able to read his thoughts, feel his feelings, live and abnormally long time even for a magical, have super powers, leap tall buildings and that sort of thing, sorry to disappoint you. All your condition really means is you have a very strong and secure relationship with a man you are very compatible with: emotionally, magically and physically. Those were preconditions to the onset of the condition, not a result of the condition. You will have a large family and the one true benefit of your condition is all your children will be very magical and healthy.

"That's not so bad," Hermione said. "Anything else I should know?"

"You had twins, right?"

Hermione nodded.

"Now, it's too early to tell in this pregnancy, but as the average couple with your condition has at least six pregnancies..."

"SIX?"

"You may well have more," Healer Johanson said. "Your condition manifested much earlier than most. As I was saying, the odds are very good you'll have at least one, maybe two more sets of twins."

"How is that possible?"

"The majority of all pregnancies, perhaps as many as seventy percent start out as fraternal twins: two fertilized eggs. Now most don't move much beyond initial conception that way. Once one egg imbeds in the uterine wall, it sets off a hormonal response designed to reject the other. Both eggs must imbed before the response takes effect for there to be twins which is why there are far fewer than 1 in 600 in all cases. Your condition makes you particularly fertile with

your intended. The hormonal response appears to be slower, increasing the likelihood of twins markedly."

"Oh my!"

"Is this a problem?"

"No. No problem. Well, not really. I just need to get used to the idea." And Harry and I may need a bigger house eventually. "And am I going to have twins?"

"It's too early to say. I can schedule you for your first ultrasound in four weeks or so. We should know by then."

"Erm..."

"Is there a problem?"

"I'm moving to London on Saturday."

"Oh."

"That's where he is. London. But my work is sending me there too."

"I see. Well, you will need an OBGYN Healer there, you know."

"I have been through..."

"Prenatal care and regular check ups. Just 'cause you've been through this before does not mean you can avoid a healer's office during your pregnancy."

Hermione nodded. She knew it was true.

"Now I hear St. Mungo's is good. But maybe you'd prefer a private office?"

"They have those?"

Sandra nodded. "I know a couple of good ones in London. Would you like their information?"

Hermione nodded.

Sandra spent a few minutes getting the contact information ready before handing it to Hermione. "And how are you traveling?"

"Portal."

"Really? Never done that before myself."

"Neither have I. Will it be a problem?" Hermione asked rubbing her lower abdomen absently.

"If you were further along, I might recommend against it. When were you with the father?"

"A little less than a month ago."

"It should not be a problem then. I am going to miss you as a patient, Janie. Most of my other ones are - well - far more difficult and reticent. You ask all the right questions and ... well, I am going to miss you."

"Thanks. You're a good Healer, Sandra."

"I like to think so," she replied chuckling. "I hope you and the father will be happy together."

"I know we'll be. Thanks."

"Drop me a line when you know more about your child, okay?"

"I will. Is there anything else I should know?"

"Well..."

WEDNESDAY - JULY 19, 2006 - 42 WHEATON WAY,
CHESTERFIELD, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

Hermione had returned home about an hour before lunch and helped her mother and the children with their final sorting in preparation for the move for the rest of the day. Everything they owned fell into one of three categories: trash, donate and move. Trash included anything that was clearly junk or worn out to the point where it was useless. Donate was mostly clothing that the

children had outgrown, but that was still serviceable such that some other child could wear it. Hermione also sorted through her own clothes and realized she had a lot that she had not worn in goodness knows how long. These found their way into the donate piles as well. Move was anything else. The trash would be picked up in the morning and the next afternoon, Hermione was going to haul the donate stuff to Goodwill or their church as there were a fair few toys that the children had outgrown that fell into that category. On Friday, their cars would be picked up and the magical movers would arrive to pack them out. They were planning on spending Friday night at a hotel near the airport - one that offered a shuttle service.

The children were finally in bed and Hermione and her mother were sitting in the living room as they had most every night since Hermione arrived at her mother's dentistry practice in Australia all those years ago. Usually, they read books or watched a movie on cable or on DVD, but this was also the time they talked. It was this time that had brought the two of them far closer together than they ever had been before. But after the past few days, Hermione really hoped her mother was more interested in a book than in talking.

"Janie?" her mother asked.

Here it comes, Hermione thought.

"Yes?"

"So ... how'd your errands go this morning?"

"Fine Mum. Just fine."

"That's good," Rose said with a smirk Hermione did not pick up as she was still concentrating on her book. "So. Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Pregnant?"

Hermione looked up with shock written all over her face. Her jaw dropped and she flushed red. It was several seconds before she was even capable of mentally responding, much less speaking. "Wh-why d-do you ask?"

"Oh nothing," Rose Granger replied. "I mean, you either are or are not and all and..."

"MOTHER!"

"It's a simple 'yes' or 'no' question, Janie."

"And what brought this on?"

"Do you want me to lay out the evidence?"

"There is no evidence, Mother!"

"I beg to differ."

"Fine!"

"Fine? 'Fine' as in 'Yes Mum I am preggers?' or 'Fine' as in 'let's hear your evidence.' Which one?"

"Evidence!"

"First of all, we have been sharing a house together for almost seven years. I know the signs that tell me it's your time of the month, so I also know you're over a week late. Second, while you and I were not together when you went through this earliest part of your last pregnancy, you did tell me what you experienced: heartburn for a few days followed by nausea and vomiting for another few days. Classic morning sickness and all the more telling because the only other time in your life that you told me you had ever experienced heartburn was the last time you were pregnant. Next, there was a used home pregnancy test in the waste basket in the bathroom, so obviously you suspected."

"Oops," Hermione blushed.

"Is there some reason you didn't want to tell me, Janie?"

"That's not it," Janie sighed, "that's not it at all. Yes, I am pregnant. I was pretty sure before I went to the Healer on Monday and that visit confirmed it. I suspected there was something else going on, although I had no idea what, and wanted to find out. I also thought I should tell Harry first and in person. Obviously, that didn't work."

"What did you think was wrong?"

"I was using the birth control potion the last time. I was using it this time. Both times I was buying my potion from reputable apothecaries."

"And this potion is like the Pill?"

"It is supposed to be better than the Pill, Mum. Witches have been using it for hundreds of years. There is a risk in making it yourself - which I've never done - because the potion is not very forgiving."

"Meaning?"

"Some potions require near absolute perfect technique and preparation to work at all and this one is just such a potion. That's why I buy it rather than make it. The odds of a store bought potion not working are astronomically low. Almost every time it was because the potion went stale. You need to take it within three months of its brewing or it won't work and each vial includes its brewing date, so I know that I had not taken a stale potion."

"Once? Okay, it could happen. Just luck, I suppose. But twice? That made no sense at all. Something else was going on. I was certain of it which was why I went to the Healer on Monday. I mean, let's face it. I am only about one month pregnant. I don't need to see a Healer yet. It was just the circumstances that..."

"I see. And was there something?"

Hermione nodded. "I was born with a predisposition for Eros Syndrome," she said softly.

"And what is that?"

Hermione then explained what it was and what it meant.

Rose Granger looked at her daughter when she had finished. "So, what you're saying is if you have sex you're going to get pregnant?"

"It's not like that Mother. Like any woman, there are times of the month when I am likely to get pregnant and times when I probably

cannot get pregnant. That hasn't changed. It just means that when I am most likely to get pregnant, should Harry and I have sex, I most likely will get pregnant - unless I am nursing at the time. She didn't tell me how, but apparently breast feeding makes me more normal."

"Normal?"

"The potion would work then."

"Oh. Well, I guess it's a good thing that you haven't had an active - er - social life," Rose chuckled.

"Actually, I probably could have had one with no worries, provided my boyfriend was not Harry. It was our long term close relationship that allowed our magic to trigger the syndrome. Basically, Harry will get me pregnant without trying. In all probability, he is the only one that can do that. Remember, this condition takes years to activate and even then, only if the man and woman are magically compatible and in a strong, emotional relationship with each other."

"And you knew nothing of this condition?"

"Before today, no. The predisposition is not uncommon apparently. But the conditions necessary to trigger it are exceedingly rare. The chances of a witch with the condition actually becoming 'active' with a partner are less than one in one thousand, and that assumes a long term partner because she must be with that partner in some manner for years."

"And this did not come up the first time?"

"I asked the right questions last time, Mother. I knew I was taking the potion and was checking to make sure it wasn't stale. Like anything, there are occasional defects which was what I was told was most likely at that time and I accepted that. Because this was the second time that has happened to me, my Healer here suspected something else - this Syndrome. She ran the extra tests and ... well, there you go."

Rose began chuckling.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"You and Harry really are an odd lot."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"You and Harry had been in love with each other for years, yet neither of you did anything about it. Not until your last time together when it seems you both knew that you were going away forever. So, you say a very intimate 'goodbye' with each other. And because of this condition you could not have known about, that 'goodbye' gave us Harry and Luna. Talk about a wonderful going away present."

"Mother?"

"Harry and Luna brought us together as a family, Janie. At that time in our lives, when you found me, we both needed family more than anything else and Harry and Luna and Daphne are that family. I do miss your Dad, Hermione, I really do. I love him still. But I never had the relationship with you that I do now when he was alive and I would hate to lose that too.

"And then you find each other again and 'say hello' and now your expecting again. I guess you could call Harry and Luna the 'goodbye' babies and the little one you are now carrying the 'hello again' baby."

"You're not disappointed in me?"

"You didn't know this was going to happen," Rose said. "I was young and in love once too. And I know how much Harry cares about you. So you had kids first and then got married. Not ideal. But from everything you and he have told me, while your approach was a bit unorthodox, it seems like the two of you were and are meant to be and that's all I could have asked for for you, Janie. God has granted you a rare and precious gift with Harry. Still, I do wish He wasn't such a prankster."

"I am a little worried, though..."

"About what?"

"About how he'll react to learning that I'm..."

"As long as he knows the child is his, I don't think he will mind at all."

"You don't?"

"Nope. In fact, I know he won't mind."

"How?"

"Cause I asked him a few days ago in an e-mail."

"YOU TOLD HIM I WAS PREGNANT?"

"No! It was a hypothetical question based upon the fact that you already had kids. He responded that so long as you married him in the end, it did not matter. Although he would insist on getting married sooner rather than later."

"I - I could live with that."

"He really does love you, Janie. I hope you realize just how lucky you are."

Hermione nodded. "I do, Mother. And I really love him too. I just wish..."

"Yes?"

"I wish we had known that years ago."

"Better late than never."

Hermione chuckled. "And even now, it's hardly late."

"You are," Rose teased.

"And it won't be the last time, apparently. The Healer said if I stay with Harry, I'll have at least six more pregnancies to look forward to and at least one more set of twins. Probably two more sets."

"Oh my."

"Short of surgical intervention, with Harry I cannot help but have a large family. You're going to have quite a few grandbabies, Mum."

"You could always abstain."

Hermione shook her head. "Apparently, that's not a realistic option."

"Why not?"

"The Syndrome affects both of us. Mostly me, but Harry as well. When our magic combines as it had, we are I guess driven to procreate. For years I tried to understand what happened those last three days with Harry. Did I want him that way? Of course. More than anyone. But it seemed so out of character for both of us. I threw myself at him! That's so not me, especially then. I was with Ron because I thought Harry did not see me that way and did not want to ruin what we did have which was an amazing friendship and I threw myself at him! But was even more puzzling is he did not stop me. The man's too bloody noble to take advantage! He's had hundreds of chances both before and after and arguably that was the only time he let his hormones rule his brain.

"That's the Syndrome. We could not help ourselves because deep down we both really did want to be together that way. And the urges overwhelmed us. Can we abstain? Most certainly as the Syndrome must have been in effect before we first made love. But the three days together were our first time alone when I was at the peak of my fertility. The same was true when we met in New York. It was at the same point in my cycle and..."

"You couldn't help yourselves," Rose said.

Hermione shrugged and blushed. "It was a bit of a surprise to learn all that. The Syndrome requires a very strong relationship. It cannot strengthen something that is not already there. Arguably, it merely confirms what we should have already known. We love each other deeply and cannot be happy without each other in our lives."

"And your children?"

"Will be healthier and more magical than we could expect with anyone else."

"So in a way it's a good thing?"

"Aside from having little choice about a large family, yes I suppose. But at least the 'large' is years away. It'll give us time to adapt."

"You are going to tell Harry this?"

"Of course. He needs to know."

"And what do you feel about this? Being pregnant again and all this?"

"Some may say we put the cart before the horse," Hermione replied, "but at least we're not forgetting the horse. I'd say it was more like 'better late than never' as I already said. I want us to be a family and have from the moment Harry said he loved me. Actually, I've wanted it for years and years. But until then, it was only a dream. Now it can be reality and it's the reality I want for me, for my children, for you and Daphne and for Harry."

"Good answer, Little One," Rose said. "Oh my!"

"What?"

"Y-you said this is congenital!"

"Yes?"

"What about Daphne? What about Luna? Could they...?"

"I didn't think to ask that. You think I should call Sandra and ask? I mean, even if they have it, it does not mean it will ever become active. They could fall in love, get married and have lots of kids even without this. The difference is I now know Harry and I will have a large family and we can now plan for it - once I tell him of course. They should know what this is someday and what it may mean for them if they meet the right young man."

Rose nodded. "I tend to agree. When should we try and find this out?"

Hermione nodded. "They're probably too young now. But I'll give Sandra a call in the morning if you'd like."

"Sounds like an idea. We should at least know what we can for your sake and for theirs."

"Thanks Mum."

"For what?"

"For ... for always being there for me."

"You're a Mum, Janie. It's what we do."

"Indeed."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2006 - HEATHROW AIRPORT, LONDON, U.K.

Rose Granger had come to love what magic could do and the longer she had lived as a part of that world, the more amazing it seemed. The magical moving company had arrived just the day before and packed up all their household goods in less than two hours. The Grangers had spend the night at a hotel near Lambert International Airport and had arrived at Concourse F, which was the magical Concourse, at 7:00 in the morning. Each Granger had a roller bag with at least four days worth of clothes and a shrunken trunk with all their other clothes packed inside. Four more shrunken trunks contained all their furniture, books, toys, keepsakes and everything else they owned that they had not decided to throw away or give to charity. They all had their "tickets" for the portal and their passports ready when they arrived and made it through check in quickly. They were directed to Portal F-8 for departure.

Promptly at 8:00, a voice announced:

"All passengers for London, Heathrow, please proceed through Portal F-8 at this time."

There were not many. The Grangers represented almost a third of the "passengers." Rose was amazed as she stepped through the door. One second she was in St. Louis and the next she was clearly in England. She didn't feel a thing. Having experienced other forms of long distance magical travel with her daughter or other magicals she knew, this was truly a new experience. On the other side, they were directed to a long cue for magical customs. A large clock announced the time as 1405, or 2.05 P.M. to the Americans.

A young woman in what looked like a Customs uniform was working her way down the cue of people handing out tiny flasks. When she reached the Grangers she asked: "Time Lag Potion?"

"What's that?" Rose asked.

"This potion will readjust you to London time. If you traveled from more than two time zones away, it is recommended," she replied.

"Does it work on non-magicals?" Rose asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes," the young woman replied. "Weasley Industries holds the patent and is lobbying the Ministry and the I.C.W. to make it available on the non-magical market. It's completely harmless and beats being up all night or needed to sleep all day until you final adjust."

"Any side affects? Can the children take it safely? How about if someone's pregnant?" Hermione asked.

"It's perfectly safe," the young woman assured them.

"We'll have some," Hermione said. She was not about to deal with her children, or worse yet ask Harry to deal with them to all hours. Their normal bed time was 8:00 which was two in the morning here. The Grangers downed their small vials of potion and followed the cue forward.

"There were only about twenty of us from St. Louis," Rose noted. "Where did all these people come from?"

"The portal is in it's infancy," Hermione said. "We're in line with all the others who have arrived here from all over. If magical travel was at the same stage as air travel, it might be different."

Rose nodded in reply as the line moved forward.

There was a commotion in front of them.

"Unhand me you filthy Mudblood!" an older woman shrieked. "My husband is Head of and Ancient House!"

"Right then," one of the Customs Inspectors said. "We don't care about what you were, Scum! You attempted to enter on a forged document with contraband. Take her away for interrogation!"

"Sir!" another replied.

"YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO TOUCH ME!"

"You have a choice, Scum! You leave here without your luggage and purse on the next available overseas portal, or you will face a

probable holiday in one of our prisons. There's a hundred kilos of heroine in your luggage. You mind explaining that?"

"Potions ingredients."

"Bint's got a million Galleons or more in illegal drugs and she wants to make potions with it," one of the agents laughed. "Take her away. And alert the Magical Police. We think we got a runner."

"Sir!"

The old woman was hauled away very unceremoniously. Fortunately she was stunned first and was not causing more of a scene.

"Right you lot!" an agent said. "She was smuggling drugs. Any of you so inclined can expect similar treatment. You are not in Britain - yet! She's going to spend two days in interrogation before we chuck her into a portal to some godforsaken place in Africa without her wand or money. That's assuming we can't find a decent reason for her to rot in prison. Any of the rest of you, you have a choice. There's a dustbin to your left with a list of contraband. Empty your luggage of anything on the list and no questions will be asked. Otherwise, it's prison or a malaria infested swamp. Your choice!"

At least five people in front of the Grangers paled and stepped out of line to check the lists.

"Hmmpf," another person in line said. "Ain't been back since the last war. Back then, that smuggler would have gotten a pass. Them pureblood dark bastards were the biggest dope smugglers in Britain then they were. They say Voldie funded his war on the stoners. Old Fudge had too much of a piece of that action to do anything. Good to see the new government actually cares to enforce the laws."

"Aye," another said. "Weren't no Customs back then. Yer could come and go what you please. Assumin' yer jus' hopin' across the Channel to France. No wonder Voldie and his scum dern near won."

"Aye."

As the line inched forward Rose turned to her daughter. "And what do you suppose that was about?"

"I guess it's one of the changes since the War, Mum," Hermione replied. "We should ask Harry."

"And what was it like back then?"

Hermione remembered that her mother knew little about the world she was now a part of before leaving Britain. "Magically, I could travel from here to Dover and then apparate across the Channel to France or back. No checks, no customs, no trail. If I wanted to magically travel to America or Australia, I had to go to the Ministry of Magic and apply for a portkey. That would leave a record that I had left. But, there were no records or Customs for people arriving that way. I guess a fair few took up smuggling as by magic you bypass Customs and other security. I guess that has changed."

"Indeed it has," and older witch replied who was just in front of them. "Can't get in or out now without passing through a Magical Customs checkpoint. Not magically anyway. And you do get checked if you travel by Muggle means as well. We were the last country in Europe to bar unregistered and unregulated international travel. I work for the Treasury. We argued for decades to regulate travel and tax imports and such. Too much of a crimp on the families that smuggled for a living and bribed our officials. When the new Charter was enacted, that changed. They'll find out who that witch was working for. If it was a Muggle, they'll share the case with the Muggles and split the funds generated from the confiscations. If it was one of the magical families, we may not have to levy much in the way of increased taxes next year."

"How could she be so stupid," Hermione said scornfully.

"Fair few of the Purebloods still are. They still assume that their name matters and they're still fool enough to try and smuggle drugs into the country. Admittedly, they have gotten smarter. That woman was probably an ex-pat who has not been here in a while."

"And the malaria infested swamp?"

"As I understand it, deportation laws do not require us to send you back to where you came from, only to send you away. Before the War, the laws favored the Purebloods over the rest of us. And by favored, I mean there were the Purebloods and then there were the rest of us. Now, the laws are equal. Shipping drugs is a crime

regardless of who you are. She was caught in Customs. She most likely will be deported and banned from ever returning again. Had she cleared Customs and then been caught, she'd probably die in prison given her age."

Hermione paled a bit.

"No worries, luv," the woman replied. "They only do that to the drug smugglers and those who import internationally banned magics. If your carrying some undesireable dark stuff, but not one banned by the I.C.W., you pay a tax and sign a registration and you're on your way. Not carrying anything like that are you?"

"N-No. I was just surprised by the security."

"Oh that. Well, you can blame the Purebloods and Voldie fer that lot. And more recently the Arabs wizards terrorists in league with certain non-magical groups over there. Customs caught a group trying to smuggle in some seriously nasty stuff a few months ago. They got the Potter-Malfoy treatment, they did."

"The what?"

"Potter's our top cop and Malfoy our top prosecutor. That lot will die in prison."

"I didn't know that Customs was under that office."

"You aren't from here, are you?"

Hermione shook her head. It was a partial truth. She was not from 2006 Britain and it was obvious that this was not 1999 Britain.

"Customs is under Special Ops 'cause of their counter-terror function. They also answer to MI-5 in the Muggle government for drug enforcement and counter-terror."

"MI-5?"

"We have liaisons in most of the Muggle government as they do with us now. We still keep our world secret from their general population, but coordination is essential at the governmental levels. Terrorists

and criminals exploit our abilities and always have. So we cooperate for our mutual safety."

"NEXT!" a voice called.

"My turn," the witch said. "Enjoyed our chat."

"Likewise," Hermione replied.

A few moments later the Customs person called "Next!" and Hermione saw that meant her and her family. "Right then," the young man in uniform said, "your bags have been cleared by the dogs..."

"Dogs?"

"Drugs, bombs and illegal potions ingredients. You did see the dogs?"

"Erm..."

"I did, Mommy," Luna said, "they're cute!"

Hermione nodded.

"Bags on the belt for a final check," the Agent said. Hermione and the others complied. "Passport?"

Hermione handed hers over and told the others to do the same.

"Americans, eh?"

"Yes sir," Hermione replied.

"How long will you be staying?"

"I have a work Visa here," Hermione replied handing the official another document. "This is my family. They're with me."

"Purpose?"

"My company is opening its European Headquarters here in London. That's where I'll be working."

"And you, Ms. Rose Granger? You have a job?"

"Here," she handed another document. "I've been hired by Potter Foundation."

After a long pause the Agent said: "Thank you. I hope you enjoy your new home." He then stamped their documents and sent them on their way.

"They didn't ask if we had anything to declare," Rose whispered to Hermione.

"Magic, Mum. We have resident Visas for now. As long as we're not carrying contraband, we have nothing to declare."

"Blimey, Joe," another agent said as the family walked away towards the main concourse, "I swear on a Galleon that was that war hero Granger!"

"Nah, couldn't be," the Agent who had checked the Passports said.

"Why not?"

"She and that lot are bloody Americans. Talk like them and all. Just a coincidence. Besides, that Hermione bird was not nearly a looker as that one."

"Suppose yer right."

The Grangers saw him before he saw them. Harry stood there in the main concourse with Teddy by his side watching and waiting. But it was Hermione who saw him first and she hurried forward with her bag trailing behind her. Her kids saw this and immediately wanted to join their Mum, but Rose held them back.

"In a moment," she said to Harry and Luna. "It's your Mother first, okay?"

The two were not terribly pleased with this, but they accepted it for now as they watched Harry and their mother embrace in a hug and then a long and deep kiss.

"Gross," Little Harry complained. "Do they have to do that?"

"They do," Rose said. "Get used to it."

"It's icky!"

Harry and Hermione were oblivious to the scene behind them. They were locked in their first real kiss signifying forever. Hermione had come home at last, they both thought and poured that thought into this memorable union.

"Knew you'd be all kissy face," a voice said after a while causing the two to break and look at the young boy who had interrupted their moment.

"Teddy?" Hermione asked looking at the boy.

"Yeah," he replied somewhat indignantly.

Hermione knelt down before him and to Teddy's surprise pulled him into a gentle hug. "Oh my," Hermione seemed to say with tears in her voice, "you're so big! Last time I held you, you were such a tiny thing compared to now. I have missed you, my Godson."

"You missed me?" Teddy asked.

"I did. I missed a lot of things."

"Then why didn't you write or anything?"

"The Wicked Witch," Harry said.

"She kept me from..."

Harry nodded.

"She better not get near me next year! I'll have a wand then and will hex her into next week!"

"Teddy?"

"She kept you away from your children and me away from my Godmother! The bint!"

"Language!" Hermione said.

"Sorry, but she's a right one," Teddy said. "You're not a wicked witch, are you?"

"No Teddy," Harry said, "she's not."

"I do love you, Teddy Lupin," Hermione said. "Had I stayed, you would know that. But I left and not because of you. I left to find my family and when I did, I stayed with them."

"I understand, I think," Teddy said. "I'd leave forever to find mine as well. Well, I would if I didn't have Dad."

Hermione pulled Teddy into another hug. "I'm never leaving you again, Teddy. Never."

"But you're gonna be all kissy faced with Dad?"

"You're going to just have to get used to that, Teddy," Harry said. "We happen to like that."

"I suppose," Teddy moped a bit.

"Daddy!" two new voices called out. Teddy looked and saw two new children who were both hugging him and their father. Both the boy and the girl were a few inches shorter than him. "We missed you," the girl said.

"Harry and Luna," Harry said, "I'd like you to meet my son and your older brother Teddy. Teddy," Harry continued, "this is my son Harry and my daughter Luna."

"Daddy says you're good at everything," Harry said with a smile.

"He did not," Luna disagreed. "Daddy said Teddy was the best in school and was really good at sports. That's not everything."

"Everything that matters."

Teddy actually laughed. "I can also fly a broom really good and am good at pranks, so yeah, everything that matters. But I can't sing at all, so I'm not good at everything."

"Can you teach us to fly?" Harry asked in awe.

"Sure thing. We got some good training brooms at the Manor."

"Manor?"

"Yeah. We have a house here in London that we live in during the week and it's a block from my school. Most weekends, though, we're at the Manor where we can fly or swim and stuff when the weather's nice."

"You have a pool?" Little Harry asked.

"At the Manor. Great big one. And a lake too."

"Cool!"

"Are you really our big brother?" Luna asked.

"Kind of, I guess."

"What do you mean?"

"Dad and your Mum are not my real parents. My real parents were killed in the war not long after I was born. Dad and your Mum were my Godparents, but they were young then. I went to live with my Gran, but she died when I was two. I went to live with Dad and he adopted me so now I am his son. Since I am his son and you two are his children and I am older, I guess I am kind of your older brother."

"Do you miss your real parents?" Luna asked.

"Didn't really know them at all, honestly. But Dad tells me all about them so I kind of do and do wish I had known them for real."

"I miss my dad that way too," another voice said. Teddy looked and saw another girl was there. She was about his height and looked like

and eight year old version of Hermione. "He died when I was just a baby. You must be Teddy," she said.

Teddy nodded.

"I'm Daphne. I am Hermione's younger sister and these two twerps Aunt."

"And you and I were born on the exact same day and at the exact same time," Teddy said with a smile.

"I knew we had the same birthday, but the same time? Are you sure?" Daphne asked.

Teddy explained how they were born on the exact same minute of that day even though they were half a world apart.

"That's pretty cool!" Daphne said. "Almost like having a twin."

"I can be your twin," Teddy said. With that, he transformed himself into a boy version of Daphne with similar feature, matching eyes and short, curly brown hair.

"That's so cool!" Little Harry said.

"Wow!" Daphne agreed. "But I think you're cuter as yourself."

Teddy transformed back, but was blushing furiously.

"Teddy?" Harry asked.

"Yeah Dad?"

"And this is Rose, Hermione and Daphne's Mum," Harry said introducing the last of the arrivals.

"Pleasure to meet you, Ma'am," Teddy replied shaking the older woman's hand.

"You're so polite!" Rose gushed. "Pity ours are not so well mannered."

"Mother!" Daphne complained rolling her eyes.

"We have some friends who are very formal," Teddy said. "Had to learn so I wouldn't embarrass the family."

"Formal friends?" Hermione asked of Harry.

"You'll meet them eventually," Harry said. "They are very busy, but I do meet with them a few times a year and Teddy now accompanies me. Right then, let's get to the car."

They left the terminal and headed out into the huge car park eventually stopping at a very new looking Range Rover. As Harry placed all the luggage in the back, the others climbed in. Hermione took the front passenger seat. Rose, Harry and Luna took the middle bench while Daphne and Teddy sat in the rear bench.

"Smells new," Hermione commented.

"Dad just bought it last week when we knew for certain you were coming," Teddy said. "His other cars are too small."

"Other cars?" Daphne asked.

"Yeah. Dad has a real cool motorcycle, but only he rides it. He has an Aston Martin, but it only seats two people. And he has a Mini-Cooper 'cause he can park it almost anywhere in the city, but it's too small for all of us."

"Really? Hermione had a Mini back home," Daphne said.

"Why's the steering wheel on the wrong side?" Little Harry asked.

"Because they drive on the left hand side of the roads here, Sweetie," Hermione answered.

"Why?"

"Don't know, but they do. It's the same in Australia."

"Makes no sense."

Harry was taking his seat. "Alright, everybody belt up."

"What?" three kids asked.

"He means buckle up," Rose said.

"We already did," Luna replied.

"Brilliant!" Harry said with a smile as he started the vehicle.

Harry took the Grangers on a "window tour" of London. A fair bit was almost on the way back to Grimmauld Place, but a fair bit was not. He knew that Hermione, Rose and Teddy had seen most of it, but the other three did not. The youngest Grangers marveled at all the strange things they saw and at how old and yet magnificent parts of London looked. There were the soaring skyscrapers that they were familiar with, but there were older and far more ornate buildings as well and it seemed there were statues everywhere. They drove through Piccadilly Circus, around Hyde Park and passed Regents Park and then Buckingham Palace.

"We have friends who live there," Teddy said.

"What?" Hermione exclaimed. "You two know the Queen?"

"As a member of the Peerage, I am expected to dine with Her Majesty on occasion," Harry replied as if it was as normal as having a pint at a pub.

"Peerage?"

"I am the 34th Earl of Gondricston," Harry said. "I know I told you that. It's not a magical title. It was bestowed on an ancestor of mine by Edward the First. So yes, technically I am a Lord. So far, however, with the Constitutional Reforms, I am the first in my family not to actually have a seat in the House of Lords, although the P.M. is trying to convince me to accept such posting one day."

"And do they know..." Hermione began.

"There are a fair few who know who and what I am. The P.M. and several of his Cabinet Secretaries do as does the Royal Family. Because of my close working relationship with Scotland Yard, MI-5 and MI-6, they naturally know I am one of their magical counterparts."

"And this does not violate the Statute of Secrecy?"

"The Statute allows for exceptions and a close working relationship with the legitimate government of Britain is such an exception. Had we had one before, maybe that whole mess of a War could have been averted."

Harry drove on. They drove to Trafalgar Square and passed the entrance to The Leaky Cauldron and through it Diagon Alley. They then headed up the Thames, passed Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament and along the river for a time before Harry proceeded inland to St. Paul's Cathedral. Then it was down to the river again and passed the Tower of London and across Tower Bridge where they headed back along the opposite side of the Thames. Ultimately, they passed the relatively new landmark, the Millennium Wheel and across Westminster Bridge and headed away from the river.

They soon passed by King's Cross and St. Pancras Rail Stations before heading further north. They passed by The Severus School of Magic where all of the children would attend beginning in September before finally pulling into the Carriage House at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. The Carriage House had bays for four carriages - now cars and originally had stables beyond. The stable space had been converted into storage rooms and a small office / library where Harry worked from home. He had a study in the main house, but this was his sanctuary in a manner of speaking. As the Grangers alighted from the Range Rover, he described the Carriage House to them.

"And we have room for one more vehicle," Harry said towards the end. "I'm thinking another Range Rover, myself. We are, after all, hoping for a larger family one day," he said eyeing Hermione who blushed.

"But," Harry continued looking at Daphne and the twins, "you're Londoners now. We use cars when we need to, but for the most part, we use the Underground."

"The what?" Little Harry asked.

"Remember the Subway in New York?" Rose asked.

Little Harry nodded.

"It's like that."

"What's upstairs," Daphne asked.

"Rec room," Teddy replied. "It's got all sorts of games and such."

"Really? What kinds?"

"Pool, darts, board games of all kinds, video games, old style pinball, all kinds. My friends and I like to hang out there. And we have a basketball hoop just outside."

"Cool," Little Harry commented.

SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry lead them into the garden between the Carriage House and the main house, levitating the luggage as they crossed through the manicured space with roses and flowers of all kinds in full bloom. Hermione saw a large stone that seemed to be lovingly tendered. She never remembered seeing it before. She walked over and saw it was a grave marker and read the inscription.

HERE LIES KREATURE

1779 - 2005

LOYAL FRIEND, DEVOTED HUSBAND

AND FATHER, BRAVE WARRIOR

AND HONORED FAMILY.

MAY HE FINALLY REST IN PEACE.

"He's gone?" she asked with a slight hitch in her voice.

"Old age finally caught up with him," Harry said softly. "He died peacefully and as he told me happy for the first time he could

remember. I asked him where he would like to be buried when he lay dying. He asked to be buried here in this garden which was his pride and joy in his final years."

"Husband and Father?"

"Day after the Final Battle he asked me. I was his Master and as an Elf he needed my permission to marry and raise a family. He married an Elf Maiden he met at Hogwarts named Darla. She works here now while raising their two children. They have a son they named Dobby and a daughter named Selena. They were twins and are six years old."

"Will we meet them?"

"Of course. They are part of my family. Teddy considers them and Inky and Moira his younger siblings in a way."

"Inky and Moira?"

"Winky's son and daughter," Harry said. "As a free elf, she could marry without permission and she married Dobby during the War when we were off camping in the wilderness. She was expecting when Dobby died."

"That's so sad," Hermione said.

Harry nodded. "Winky and her family live here too. Winky's part time as she is employed at the Ministry in House Elf Affairs and holds a seat in Parliament. She says that after being freed, marrying Dobby and coming to live here are the best things that have ever happened to her."

"So they are free?"

"They are bonded to me, Hermione. House Elves need a family. Being cut loose like Winky was causes pain and depression and in most cases death. She is paid, but she is a Potter for life. I see them as the siblings I never had. They are all family now and Teddy and I treat them that way."

"And what about Dobby? He seemed okay with freedom."

"He bonded to me, Hermione, the day I tricked Malfoy into freeing him. I didn't know it until after he died. He died a Potter."

"I never knew that about them. I never knew."

"Your idea of promoting their welfare was the right idea. Freeing them was not. Then again, neither of us knew. As a race of beings, they are far better off than they were before. A mistreated elf is removed from that family and placed with another - not unlike a mistreated child. A lot of old Purebloods are now banned from having elves. Things are a lot better for them and most of the thanks belongs to you, Hermione."

"Really?"

Harry nodded as he took her by the hand and led her to the main house.

They were quickly settled into their rooms. Daphne and Luna shared a room just as they had before. It was already furnished and the two girls were not thrilled with the décor, but they had been promised that they could redecorate as they wanted later. Harry and Teddy would share a room as well. Harry had no issues with his new room. He had an entire half to himself where he could place his stuff. Teddy's side was so cool, Little Harry thought and he hoped his side would be cool as well. Rose had her own room as well and like her daughter and granddaughter would probably redecorate. But it would do. Hermione, of course, was staying with Harry.

They finished dropping off their luggage and returned to the Ground Floor and met the elves.

"What time's dinner, Darla?" Teddy asked.

"Six thirty for you lot," Darla said.

Teddy looked at his watch. "Cool! Over two hours! Dad? Can me and the others go to the park?"

"Where is this park?" Rose asked.

"Just 'cross the street," Teddy answered.

Harry looked at Rose and Hermione who both nodded. "Sure thing, Ted. Have fun!"

"You're gonna love this," Teddy said to Daphne, Little Harry and Luna as he led them out the front door.

"Is it safe for them?" Hermione asked. When she was last here, Grimmauld Place was slowly changing from a bad neighborhood into a nice one.

"Safest place in London to be a magical child. Whole neighborhood is magical," Harry said. "There are thirty-eight garden homes on this cul-de-sac. Most are subdivided into two or three flats. In the center of everything is our park which has been completely redone. Everyone uses it. There's a play park for the kids and places to walk and sit and even eat and grill and stuff. The whole cul-de-sac is magical. At the base of the U shaped road and at the corners of the U, we have a pub, McMillan's Mart - a grocery store chain founded by our classmate Ernie McMillan, and a few shops. Not Diagon Alley, mind you, but you can get all the basics here. Grimmauld place is now home to over six hundred witches and wizards including children. It's protected by wards to keep all but the invited non-magicals away."

"Anyone I know live here?" Hermione asked. "Aside from you, of course."

"Well, there's Ernie and Hannah McMillan and their kids..."

"Hannah? Hannah Abbott?"

Harry nodded. "Ernie owns the Ernie's Market chain although Hannah runs it as Ernie has a job at the Ministry. Got shops all over Britain. Hannah also now runs the Leaky Cauldron. There's also Terry and Padma Boot..."

"Padma Patil?"

Harry nodded. "They also work at the Ministry. And Justin Finch-Fletchly and his wife Sally-Anne."

"Not Sally-Anne Perks?" Hermione asked. "She was my dorm mate until after Fourth Year!"

"That's her. Percy and Penelope Weasley live a few doors down from us. And there's Roger and Daphne Davies."

"Daphne?"

"Greengrass. Her younger sister is married to Draco."

"Any others?"

"Dean and Parvati Thomas, for one."

"Get out! Dean married Parvati?"

Harry nodded. "And Seamus and Susan Finnegan."

"Susan? Susan Bones?"

Harry nodded. "Loads of other you would not know as well."

"I ... Harry, how can we keep us secret with all that?"

"Your secret will certainly be out by next Saturday. I really don't see any reason why we should hide here until then. After all, I am planning to take you and the kids to Diagon Alley on Monday or Tuesday..."

"Why?"

"Teddy and Daphne need their wands for school, don't they?"

Hermione nodded.

"But for tonight, I'd like to take you on a date."

"A date?"

"Dinner at a nice restaurant, some dancing. You know, a date. We never really had one."

"I like to think we did once."

"When?"

"That weekend when we drove to Godric's Hollow and had lunch and the movies the next day. That was a nice 'date' I thought."

"Ah, but not one as a true couple."

Hermione nodded.

"So?" Harry asked.

"A date? Tonight?"

Harry nodded.

"But I have nothing to wear. Everything is still packed!"

"Darla is waiting. She'll fix you up proper. So? Do you want to go on a date with me?"

"I ... yes Harry, I do."

"Excellent! Darla?"

"And the kids?"

"Already spoke to your Mum about this. She'll watch over them and such."

"Had this all planned, did you?" Hermione asked.

"For weeks."

SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2006 - THE MILLENNIUM WHEEL,
LONDON, U.K.

Hermione was a little confused about this part of their date. Harry had taken her to Ristorante Da Vinci, a lovely Italian restaurant that Harry told her was his favorite. They had a nice, candlelit table for two and talked and talked about loads of things as their dinner progressed. When they had finished their main meal, Harry had asked her to dance, for there was a dance floor and slow and romantic music had been playing as other couples enjoyed their moments together. Hermione danced with her Harry for she had no

idea how long. Finally, after becoming totally used to being in Harry's arms, they returned to their table for dessert.

Harry had already outdone himself. Darla had provided Hermione with a very flattering, deep blue dress. Hermione always thought blue was her best color and this dress seemed to prove the point. Darla had also done her hair. Hermione thought she looked good when she finally came down to meet Harry. His expression upon seeing her was priceless and took her breath away as well. He then told her she was missing something and handed her two jewelry boxes. One had a simple yet elegant sapphire necklace and the other matching earrings. She protested it was too much, but he dismissed her saying that there was no such thing.

Following dessert and another couple of dances, they left and drove here to the Millennium Wheel. She had no idea why or what Harry was up to with this. She learned he had timed everything so that they would be on the last car of the day rising above London. As it turned out, they were the only people in their car.

"Why are we here Harry?"

"You've never been on the Wheel before," Harry replied as they began to rise. "I take all new comers to London here, I will admit, but not at night. London is so beautiful at night. I have given you my heart and I now give you London as you've never seen it before, Hermione."

"That's so romantic," Hermione sighed as she fell into a hug.

"It's supposed to be," Harry chuckled. "You deserve that."

"Thanks Harry."

She held on to him as they rose. True, she had a fear of heights, but she was not clinging for that fear. She just wanted to be in his arms. She watched as London slowly sprawled beneath them. This was London. This was her childhood home. And now it was her home again and it was so beautiful. She had forgotten about her pregnancy and her condition and just relaxed in Harry's arms as they rose into the London night.

As they neared the top, Harry broke the hug to Hermione's surprise. He still held on to her hands and he looked at her.

"Hermione?"

"Yes."

"I have loved you for years and years, Hermione. Even when I refused to admit it to myself. I love you with all that I am and can be. I love our kids and no one can ever tell me they were a mistake. With you I now feel complete. When you were away, there was a huge gaping hole in my life and it took me a long while to realize what that hole was. It was your absence. I felt complete when you were with me. I feel complete again. The time we were apart was such a feeling of emptiness. I now know, I cannot live without you in my life."

"Harry?" Hermione began while her brain screamed 'Oh My God! He's going to ask me!'

Harry dropped to his knee just as the wheel and their car reached the apex of its journey. "Hermione? I love you more than life itself. I love our kids and want them to have brothers and sisters as well. Hermione? Will you marry me?" And with that he held forth a large diamond ring.

Hermione was in tears by now. He asked me! Her head screamed that over and over.

Tears streamed down her face as all she could do for several seconds was cry. Finally, her voice returned. "Yes, Harry." she said through her tears. "I will marry you, Harry." With that, Harry slipped the ring on her finger and she became his intended. He rose to his feet, pulled his future wife into his arms and kissed her as if tomorrow would never come as she did to him.

"Harry?" Hermione finally asked as her special kiss ended.

"Hmm?"

"I'm pregnant."

"What? Okay, um. It is mine?"

"Of course it is, Harry."

"How? I mean, not that I mind at all but..."

Hermione then explained how.

"So," Harry started after learning about Eros Syndrome, "we can't help but have kids?"

Hermione nodded. "I'm sorry Harry."

"For what? This is brilliant! I am so happy about this! Always wanted an big family and now we can't help but have one!"

"You're not upset?"

"Of course not! This is so ..."

"I was worried you might be upset."

"I told you, Hermione, your call."

"My what?"

"We agreed on at least two more, but it was your call if there would be more and I hoped there would be."

"So you're..."

"I am happy, Hermione. We'll have a large family and our kids will never be as alone as we were as children! This is perfect!"

"Harry, there's something else."

"What?" Harry asked expecting the other shoe to drop.

"I think we should get married sooner rather than later. By the end of the summer for certain. I want to marry you, but I don't want to be very pregnant or nursing a new born when I do."

Harry smiled at her.

"What?" Hermione asked in confusion.

"You have plans for next Saturday?" Harry replied.

"Next Saturday?"

"We can get married then."

"Harry I want a real wedding!"

"I can assure you it will be quite real. All the arrangements are made and such..."

"But my friends won't be there!"

"They've already been told and they'll all be there. Including Amanda."

"Harry!" Hermione growled. "What are you talking about."

"Your Mum and I and our friends have it all set up. All those plans you've been doing? Well, we all hoped it would be for next Saturday. So?"

"You mean all of it?"

Harry nodded.

"You've been planning this all along?"

"A somewhat surprise wedding at my Manor."

"But I want a Catholic Wedding."

"Already got the dispensation from the Bishop."

"Pre-Cana?"

"You went through it at your church. The counseling with your Pastor?"

"You're kidding."

"Nope. And I went through it with my Pastor who will be the Binder for us. Father O'Leary's a good Pastor. We'll wed under a tent at my Manor as my family has done for generations, unless the weather is bad, in which case it'll be at St. Michaels down the road."

"You mean all the planning Mum and I have done..."

"Was in hopes that this coming Saturday would be the day."

"I..."

"Please say yes?"

"Honeymoon?"

"Got that planned as well."

"Where?"

"Surprise. I think you will like it though."

"I want this, Harry."

"So do I. All you have to say is 'Yes' and it will happen."

"Yes Harry," and she kissed him. "And thank you, you sappy romantic devil," she added before kissing him again.

"All I wanted, aside from you being my wife for the rest of our lives, was a proposal you'd never forget and a wedding to match."

Hermione kissed him again before replying. "I'll never forget this night, Harry. You're half way there."

"Thanks."

"No, Harry thank you and I love you!"

"Love you too, Hermione."

"Tell the children?" Hermione asked.

"In the morning, although I think we both know they'll be asking as soon as they see us."

"They will indeed. Harry?"

"Yes Love?"

"Thank you for the perfect date."

"It was my pleasure, Hermione. Now much as I'd love to kiss you, our ride is at an end. Care for a long snog in my car?"

"Sounds like a wonderful plan!" And Harry and Hermione stepped out of their car on the Wheel and walked back to his car in the car park for their good, long snog.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

SUNDAY, JULY 23, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Harry awoke after the best night's sleep he had had in weeks. He knew why. He almost immediately felt why and certainly saw why as soon as his eyes opened in the sun filled bedroom. Brown locks were practically in his face as her head lay upon his chest. As always, she fell asleep listening to his heartbeat and never seemed to move in the night. Her arms were draped across his chest and a leg also crossed his body. He had fallen asleep holding her in his arms in a cuddle and awoke with one arm still holding her. He could get used to this he thought. He lay there, letting his Angel and soon to be wife sleep and dream as he remembered everything about the night before. He wanted the proposal to be perfect and he thought he came close.

Her news had stunned him. She was again carrying his child or children - it was too early to tell but she told him twins were not out of the question by a long shot given her condition. Harry thought he surprised both of them by being so accepting of the situation and on the drive home suggested they talked to Molly and Arthur about raising a large family. Hermione was surprised at that until Harry told her he had mended his fences with most of the Weasleys ages ago. Ron was a recent change. Ginny? She had probably burnt one bridge too many in Harry's opinion.

Harry remembered getting ready for bed and a very naked Hermione coming out from "their" bathroom and crawling under the covers with him.

"Make love to me, Harry," she said softly into his ear after kissing him senseless.

"Are you sure?" Harry said, "I mean given your condition?"

"Harry! I'm pregnant, not broken. I think I can handle this!"

And she certainly could.

"Hmmm," Harry heard her sigh with pleasure and felt her move as she stretched herself. "This is so nice," she added.

Harry hugged her closer to him, if that was possible. "It sure is," he replied. Hermione shifted around so she could look into Harry eyes and gave him a soft yet loving kiss.

"So, what's the plan on this the first day for the rest of our lives, My Soon-to-be Husband?" Hermione said softly.

"Er - what time is it? I'd look myself, but I don't want you to move just so I can get my glasses."

"A little after Seven," Hermione replied. "Why?"

"That explains why Darla didn't wake me," Harry said.

"What do you mean?"

"She usually wakes me on the weekends," Harry said. "Occasionally it's 'cause Teddy needs me. But regardless, she makes sure I'm up and in the kitchen cooking breakfast by 8:30. It's part of our routine. I cook breakfast for us on weekends and try to cook at least two dinners a week as well."

"And lunch?"

"Not into that, really."

"Back to my question. Aside from having at least another hour's lie in, what are your plans for us today?"

"I definitely have plans for you during this lie in, assuming that's okay with you."

"It is and you'd better, My Love. But I meant it. Aside from that, what are we doing because as much as I love that with you, we can't do that all day. There's my Mum and our kids to think about."

"I like the sound of that. 'Our kids'," Harry said softly. "And it's a pity we can't spend the day like this. Guess I'll just have to wait for the honeymoon."

"Well, if you want to spend the whole honeymoon in bed with me, not that I'd mind, you had better have picked a place that's boring. Where are you taking me?"

"Surprise."

"Like the wedding this Saturday? You did tell me about that? Or was that just because you found out that I'm..."

"I was going to tell you anyway, Hermione. As much fun as it might have been for your first clue that it was your wedding day was when you were escorted down the aisle, I'm not sure you would have appreciated that."

"I might have, if everything was perfect. But I am glad you told me. I mean it would be hard for me not to notice some things, such as my friend from America in their dresses and such."

"And a rehearsal," Harry added. "Besides, your mother made it clear I should tell you early so that we could hold off if you weren't willing just yet. I am glad you are, but is that because you're expecting?"

"That did factor in, Harry. But I would have said yes to this anyway. It was such a special surprise, how could I not?"

"And the pregnancy?"

"Harry, you asked me to marry you back in New York before I knew or could have known I was expecting and I said I would back then too. You formally proposed and gave me this stunning ring before I told you I was expecting. We are getting married because we love each other and because we have waited all this time, I want to become your wife as soon as possible. I didn't want to walk down the aisle with a baby bump, but I would have. We know why we're getting married and its not because of my condition. However, other people might assume that if it was obvious that I was expecting and ..."

"I understand, dear."

"Now, what about today?"

"Well, after we make love, shower, get dressed and have breakfast, I'm thinking we should take it easy. Let the kids get to know each other. Maybe unpack some of your family's stuff and get their rooms

set up the way they would like. The kids can also go to the park and we could take a walk around the neighborhood. That sort of thing."

"Why a quiet day? Not that I think it's a bad idea?"

"Things will be hectic soon," Harry said. "Tomorrow, we need to go to the school and get the kids registered for the fall term. We can then take them to Diagon Alley for some shopping as Teddy and Daphne will need to buy their wands and I want to be ahead of the late summer rush. Tuesday, I was thinking of showing your kids the sites around London in more detail. Wednesday, I was thinking of spending in Hogsmeade. We can visit my Cousin and Hogwarts and Hagrid's zoo. Should be fun for them. Thursday we will move to the Manor. I know you've never seen it. I have scheduled a brunch for us and all our guests from overseas that morning. Friday is the Rehearsal. Saturday is my annual picnic and wedding. Sunday we're off on our Honeymoon for four days. The day we get back, you're Mum wants to hold a 'late' Birthday for me. Then we're off to the states for three weeks. Busy, busy, busy."

"Might need a second honeymoon just to recover," Hermione suggested.

"I'll keep that in mind," Harry said. "Now, as to today's activities?"

"If you don't make love to me soon, Harry, I am going to be one very annoyed witch."

"Well, we can't have that, can we?"

Harry left their room about twenty minutes before Hermione to start cooking breakfast for the household. After washing up and getting dressed for the day, Hermione followed. The kitchen was located in the basement of the house and aside from a brighter décor and new, non-magical appliances, it looked as it did when she had first set foot in the house over ten years before. Harry had once told her he pretty much left the kitchen alone when he renovated the house, aside from the appliances, because it was the one room where he had always felt at home. When she arrived in the kitchen, which was where she knew Harry usually ate his meals, he was busy cooking away and she saw that no one else was down yet. Coffee, milk and juice were already on the table and Hermione poured herself a cup of coffee after sitting down.

She suddenly felt a weight on her lap and looked down and saw something mostly white and very wooly resting there. "Eeep!" she exclaimed. "What's this?"

Harry looked over and saw the shaggy face. "That's just Willie," Harry said.

"Wh-what's he doing?"

"She is just saying 'good morning'," Harry replied.

"She?"

"Willie is short for Wilhelmina," Harry exclaimed.

"Oh. She's kind of cute."

"And very friendly. Good with kids too. One of the reason I bought an Old English Sheep Dog is they're supposed to be very good with young children."

"Why didn't we see her yesterday?" Hermione asked.

"When we first arrived she was probably at the park and probably did not come home until after you and I left on our date."

"What was she doing at the park?"

"Watching the neighborhood children," Harry replied.

"Why?"

"It's what she does. She's a sheep dog and herding a flock is inherent in her breed. Well, there are no sheep here to herd, but there are children. So she likes going to the park and keeping an eye on her 'flock.' If one of her little lambs tries to wander off without its parent, she herds them back to the play park."

"And the neighbors?"

"Everyone around here loves our Willie," Harry said with a hint of pride in his voice. "Isn't that right girl?"

The dog left Hermione and went over to Harry for a pat.

"And last night?" Hermione asked.

"We got back after the kids bedtime. Willie usually sleeps in Teddy's room and she goes up when he does. She comes down, though as soon as I do for her morning meal."

"She seems like a sweet dog," Hermione said.

"Very sweet," Harry agreed.

"And she has no problem with strangers like me?"

"She's a very smart dog. She seems to sense if Teddy or I am uncomfortable with someone. If we are, she tends to stand between us and the stranger. If we really don't like the person, she may even growl at them."

"Happen often?"

"Not really. There were a couple of times a reporter managed to get here and got a good growling. Oh, and Ginny once was in the neighborhood looking for Percy and Willie took offense. She's a really good dog," Harry chuckled at the memory.

"Morning!" a young girl's voice called and Hermione saw that Daphne had entered the kitchen. "Hey Willie!" Hermione watched as the dog immediately went up to her younger sister for a pat. "You're such a lovely dog, Willie. You know that?" Willie wagged her tail and panted. The pink tongue was about the only feature on the dog's face that was not woolly, Hermione noted. One could not even see the dog's eyes through the fur. But it seemed clear the dog had no problem seeing despite its mop of fur.

"She slept in our room last night," Daphne said.

"Not in your bed," Hermione gasped.

"No, Sissy. She was a good dog and slept on the floor between our beds."

"Oh."

"Aside from a couch in the First Floor Parlor, Willie stays off the furniture," Harry said. "Don't know what she sees in that couch, though," he added with a chuckle.

Soon, the rest of the House was up and made their way down to the kitchen. Hermione watched as everyone else said their good morning to the dog before taking their place at the table, eagerly awaiting Harry's omelets, bacon, toast and breakfast potatoes.

Over the last several years, ever since Daphne was born, Rose Granger had come to realize she loved magic. She knew she could not do real magic for the life of her, but her daughters and grandchildren could or would one day and so could many of the friends she had made over the years. True, like Harry there were things she preferred to do 'by hand' as in without magic and that included her practice and cooking, although she was of the opinion after their breakfast that Harry was probably the better cook in the house. Packing and unpacking, however, was not high on the list of things she liked doing 'by hand.'

Following breakfast, Harry had recommended that they get the 'Grangers' moved in. The last thing Rose wanted was to spend such a lovely day redecorating and rearranging rooms or unpacking their stuff. But between Harry, Hermione and Darla and Winky, the Grangers were moved in within three hours. The girls loved their revamped room. They kept some of the furnishings, but replaced most with the furniture from their old home. Little Harry too was happy with his side of his room, although it still was not as "cool" as Teddy's side. And Rose's room was now a combination bedroom and sitting room she had always dreamed about having. Everything was unpacked and put away. Family pictures joined those of Harry and Teddy in the parlors and living room. Toys now had their place as did all of the books the Grangers had brought with them from America. DVD's joined the Potter collection. Less than three hours and they had become one family for any visitor to the house to see.

Lunch, therefore, was very relaxed and Harry recommended they spend the afternoon at the park across the street. The kids were all in favor of this, but Hermione was a little reticent.

"Are you sure?" she asked Harry.

"I admit, I hope we can keep out of the 'public eye' at least until the picnic," Harry replied. "But I don't think hiding is a real option, do you?"

"Erm..." Hermione really wanted to limit exposure with regards to her sister and children.

"Besides, if 'Operation Skeeter Bait' is working as well as Lav said, all the gossip reporters are in California searching for 'Silicone Valley' and the now infamous 'Janie.' Should be safe enough to enjoy a day in the park."

"What about other reporters?"

"You are not news to them, Hermione."

"And Ginny?"

"She's not going to be a bother," Harry said. "Not unless she's been sacked. She has a match today."

"Well, if you're sure..."

Thus it was that Hermione soon found herself on a bench in the park across the street. It was so different from her last time here. Then, it had been overgrown with weeds and quite depressing. Now, it was a perfect place to spend a nice afternoon. Teddy, Daphne and her kids were playing in the play park with many of the neighbor children. Harry's dog Willie was patrolling the perimeter keeping the younger ones from wandering off, just as Harry said. She was sitting on a bench reading a book as Harry watched the kids with his arm around her shoulder. Her mother was reading a book as well. A perfect day in a park, she thought.

Across the way, six young mothers and wives stood in a sort of huddle. Three had prams with young babies in them. One was noticeably pregnant and another had the beginning of a baby bump. Only the sixth seemed to be without child, then again she was a newly wed although she was beginning to suspect she would be joining the maternity crowd very soon. There were two blondes, including the newly wed, a brunette with deep blue eyes, a red head with bright blue eyes and two dark skinned, dark haired and dark

eyed young women who happened to be twins. With the exception of the newlywed, all five had children playing in the park ranging from the age of two to six. While each kept an eye on their children, they were not terribly concerned because the neighborhood babysitter was on duty. Each mother secretly thanked their neighbor Harry for that wonderful dog of his.

The young women could spend their time talking about what young wives and mothers were fond of without worrying too much about their young children in the play park. They knew Willie would round up the strays and break up any fights. A day with that dog in the park was an easy day to be a mother as the dog did not distinguish between any of the children, including her own Teddy. That dog's mission in life was to protect her flock and keep them together and the dog did a far better and more gentle job of it than most humans. This meant the adults could socialize and not be too worried about their little ones, although as parents they did not ignore them either.

"My goodness," one of the young women exclaimed, "take a look!" She nodded her head across the way. "It's Harry!"

"So?" another said.

"Look!"

The other five could not help but look. There was their neighbor and friend Harry with his arm around a brown haired woman none of them could recognize at this distance.

"Sweet Merlin!" one of the twins exclaimed. "You don't suppose that's the 'Janie' the press has been on about?"

"They look pretty close for it to be just a casual date," her sister replied.

"Think we should make our introduction?" the red head asked.

"I don't know," the dark haired woman with blue eyes replied, "we all know how he likes his privacy about this sort of thing."

"We're neighbors and friends," one of the blondes said. "If she is with him, it is our duty to make her feel welcome!"

The others agreed with the blonde. They could not just walk across as the babies in the prams were sleeping and the bumpy ground would surely wake them, so the group walked around to Harry and whoever the woman was on the pavement that surrounded the park. It took them a few minutes to complete the journey.

"Hey Harry," one of the twins said as the group arrived at his bench.

Harry turned and looked at the speaker. "Hey Parvati. Lovely day isn't it?"

The woman he had his arm around gasped and turned to see the speaker.

"Merlin's Beard!" one of the others exclaimed. "It can't be? They say you're dead!"

"Hermione Granger?" another asked.

"I thought the press said Harry was with some American named 'Janie'," a third added.

Harry smiled weakly at the six women he knew.

"That would be me," Hermione said almost insulted.

"But..."

"It's been a while, Parvati," Hermione continued. "Nice to see you again."

"But..." Parvati protested. "But the..."

"What happened to you, Hermione?" Susan asked. "I mean you disappeared off the face of the planet!"

"I almost believed the space alien thing," Hannah added. "Made more sense that some of the rubbish they printed."

"What are you doing here?" Padma asked. "I mean after all these years?"

"And what's with the two of you?" Parvati added.

"Slow down," Hermione said rolling her eyes. "I mean it's impossible to answer a question every second or so!"

"Sorry," several voices replied.

"Are you two a couple now?" Susan asked.

"I'd say we're more than that," Hermione replied turning on the bench and revealing her ring.

"No way!" Hannah said. "You're two are engaged?"

"As of last night officially," Harry chuckled.

"No way!"

"Then who is this 'Janie' the press is on about?" Susan asked.

"That would be me," Hermione smiled.

"But they say she's a blonde bint with fake boobs from California," Parvati protested.

"And you believe the gossip columns about me?" Harry whined.

"Well, no Harry," Parvati said. "You're ex? Sure. I've even had the shame of seeing her in action once. But..."

"Still," Hannah said, "what the bloody hell happened? Where have you been all this time and how is it you're here with Harry?"

"I left and now I came back," Hermione said. "Lived in America for the last several years. My company is opening an office here and here I am to head it."

"There's more to this than that," Parvati said.

"Indeed," Hermione agreed.

"And?"

"First off, introductions are in order," Hermione replied. "This is my Mum, Rose," she added indicating the older woman seated on the bench. "Mum?"

"Yes Dear?"

"These are some of my friends from way back," Hermione continued.

"Parvati Thomas," Parvati said, "and my youngest Jason," she added indicating the baby in her pram. "My older two - Alisha and Katie are in the park."

"Padma Boot," Padma added. "I have two young ones out in the park - Terrance Jr. and Catherine - and obviously another on the way," she added rubbing her very obvious baby belly. "He or she is due in October."

"Congratulations," Rose said.

"Parvati was my roommate at Hogwarts," Hermione added. "Padma is her twin sister, but was in a different House."

"Pleased to meet you," Rose added.

"Hannah McMillan," the first blonde said. "My son Michael is probably giving Harry's Willie fits. Little Amber is playing in the sand."

"Susan Finnegan," the red head said. "My Erin is with Amber and my second is due in March," she added rubbing her new baby bump.

"Again, congratulations," Rose said.

"Sally-Anne Finch-Fletchly," the other blonde said. "This is my little Jonathan," she added pointing to the sleeping baby in her pram. "Ian, Megan and Rachel are off in the park. Oh! Looks like Rachel has decided to come over! Your dog is so smart, Harry."

"Thanks, I think so too," Harry replied as Willie made no effort to stop the little girl from going to her mother.

"Daphne Davies," the final woman said. "No kids - yet. Been married only six months..."

"Although we think she's expecting," Parvati added.

"Yeah, probably," Daphne said.

"My friend Draco's married to her younger sister Astoria," Harry added.

"Pleasure," Rose said shaking Daphne's hand.

"So," Parvati asked, "where have you been all this time, Hermione?"

"St. Louis," Hermione answered. "Well, most all of it." She then told an abbreviated version of her trip to Australia and then her time in America.

"University?" Sally-Anne asked.

Hermione nodded. "Got a job in magical research and development after. Then moved into marketing which brought me to New York where I ran into Harry again and had a wonderful time, professionally and personally and now I've moved back to head up my company's new European operations."

"When did you move back?" Parvati asked.

"Erm - well yesterday, to be exact." Hermione then turned fully around and now the six women could see her ring.

"You got engaged that day you moved back?" Parvati asked.

Hermione nodded.

"Kind of fast, don't you think?"

"Guess that depends on one's point of view." Harry said.

"So you met yesterday and were engaged the same day?" Hannah asked.

"Actually, we met at a conference in New York last month and got 'officially' engaged last night," Hermione said.

"Seems rather quick," Parvati said.

"And just how long were you and Dean dating before you announced?" Padma asked her sister.

"Openly about two months, but you know we had been sneaking about together since Seventh Year, so it's not the same, Pad. I mean no one hears from Hermione in years, she runs into Harry in New York and a month later they're engaged? Seems very short to me. Don't get me wrong. I am happy for you both but..."

"Actually, if you must know, we had been in love for a long time even though we were apart," Hermione said.

"For years, if you must know. I 'unofficially' proposed about a month ago when we ran into each other in New York..."

"Hold on," Hannah interrupted, "unofficially? What's the difference?"

"A ring and the date," Harry said.

"And you have a date?" Padma asked.

The two nodded.

"When?"

"Secret," Harry replied.

"So we're not invited?" Parvati said.

"You most certainly will be there," Harry replied. "But I am not telling you yet 'cause we don't want to risk a media circus. Teddy and the others don't need that."

"Others?"

Harry and Hermione then told them more about how they met again and how they had been kept apart.

"That bitch!" Susan said. "You were writing to him for ages?"

Hermione nodded.

"That bitch!"

"It's worse than you think, Susan," Harry sighed.

"How could it be worse than that! You love her! She loves you! And that bint binned her letters to you!"

Harry nodded to Hermione. "They are my friends," he said softly.

Hermione nodded in reply. "Kids?" she called out and four children ran over to them.

"My look alike is my sister Daphne," Hermione began. "You all know Teddy, of course."

The six witches nodded.

"These two are my kids - Harry and Luna. They're twins. Harry's named after his father..."

"No way!" Susan said first. "You and Harry?"

"I had broken up with Ron and Harry with Ginny at the time," Hermione said. "And let's not get into detail?"

"Understood, sorry. But really?"

"Daddy?" Little Harry asked, "Mommy? Can we go back and play?"

"Of course, Sweetie," Hermione said. As Harry raised no objection, the four of them returned to the play park.

"Those two little darlings are yours?" Hannah asked the both of them.

Harry and Hermione nodded.

"And you knew nothing about them?"

"Not until Hermione and I met again," Harry said. "Her letters were full of them. But..."

"That selfish bitch!" To Harry's surprise it was Daphne he spoke up.
"How could she?"

Harry shrugged. "Obviously, I married the wrong woman the last time."

"Tell me about it," Parvati said. "She's probably slept with every male in magical Britain that has no wife or nor morals - fair few women as well..."

"I suppose," Harry replied.

"What makes it worse," Rose began, "is she binned the letters. She kept Harry from learning about his kids and having a choice about whether he wanted to be a part of their lives, regardless of what he felt for my daughter - and he had and has strong feelings for her."

Harry nodded in agreement.

"She read them?" oddly it was Daphne who asked.

Harry shook his head. "Don't think so."

"Who knows?" Padma asked.

"Erm..."

"Who knows about all of this? Aside from us."

"Fair few, but not many," Harry replied.

"Apparently Ginny is stalking him," Hermione said. "Has been for a few weeks trying to get her family onboard to help her."

"And?" Susan asked.

"So far, she's been kicked to the curb."

"Serves her right," Parvati added.

"How so?" Rose asked rhetorically.

"Please! When we were in school, none of us understood why Harry and Ginny got together! Although that made far more sense than Ron and Hermione. Those two could barely stand one another!"

"Hey!" Hermione said, "I am here!"

"Sorry, Hermione."

"But it is true," Susan said.

"Was true the whole time I knew you," Sally-Anne added. "You could barely stand him."

Hermione could only nod in agreement.

"You're little ones are so adorable," Daphne said trying to change the topic. "Are they going to attend school here?"

Hermione nodded. "They'll start their first year this fall."

"Must have been a love potion involved," Padma said.

"What?" several voices asked.

"Well how else can you explain Hermione and Ron? They were always at each other's throats!"

"No potion," Hermione said quietly. "At least not between Ron and I - I think."

"So there was one?" Daphne asked.

Harry nodded. "Ginny," was all he said.

"And you and Ron?" Daphne asked.

"I suppose at the time I settled," Hermione sighed. "I loved Harry even then, but I assumed he did not feel the same way about me and Ron was interested then - or so I thought."

"And all the while he was with Lavender," Daphne said in disgust.

"YOU WILL NOT BAD MOUTH LAVENDER!" Hermione said.

The other women where honestly stunned by Hermione's vehement defense of the woman who had in everyone's mind stolen her boyfriend and future husband.

"Yes!" Hermione continued, "I admit I caught them in bed together so to speak! That's why I dumped Ron! But we have talked since then and Lavender is not and was not what I thought she was. She turned Ron around in the end and that was something I don't think I could ever have done because I never loved him that way. I hated her for years! But we met up again - the same day I met up with Harry - and ... well, she really is an amazing person to bring Ron around like that."

"You mean she knows about you and Harry?" Parvati asked.

Hermione nodded. She knew that for ages Parvati and Lavender had a friendly competition as to who had the inside scoop on gossip and knew by nodding Parvati had lost of the Hermione - Harry saga. Hermione did not care.

"I may never know their whole story," Hermione said, "but I consider Lavender a friend and she is one impressive woman. She turned that git around and made him what he is today and I am impressed with Ron - now. It's Harry I love. But I am pleased my other 'best friend' has come into his own and for that there's no one other than Lavender to thank.

"How could any woman have put up with Ron's infidelity and such? Yet she saw something and put up with his immaturity and knew that her patience would come through in the end.

"I was patient as well with Harry. Not like that, though. He did not break my heart over and over again like Ron did with Lavender. He did break it, but not like that! I have nothing but respect for her and wish I had half the courage, fortitude and patience she has.

"But I know I have my Harry. It took ages for us to see it, but there it is and at least I did not have to suffer the heartbreak she did. Not that I did not. But I now know Harry and I were kept apart not by our own devices."

"Sorry," Daphne replied. "I - I just assumed..."

Hermione nodded unwilling to speak anymore.

"You really are a special woman in your own way," Rose said softly. "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

"So," Hannah said trying to change to a more pleasant topic, "those two darlings are really yours?"

Hermione nodded.

"We have six years to make up for with them," Harry added.

"And we are going to," Hermione finished.

"So you're really back?" Parvati added.

"Yeah, I really am," Hermione replied.

"Let's just keep that quite for now," Harry added.

"For how long," Parvati asked.

"Until the picnic next Saturday," Harry said. "I am sure that this relationship cannot survive that in secret beyond then," he added giving Hermione and Rose a knowing glance.

The six young women nodded and after a time moved off to leave the couple to themselves, yet each felt they had been witness to something special for their neighbor and friend. Each was, in her own way, happy for Harry and thrilled that Hermione was truly back amongst them. Grimmauld place - blessed for years, they thought - had been blessed yet again.

Later, Hermione sought out the six women. They were sitting and talking and watching their children at play. Hermione had put down her book, having finished her chapter, and looked to her old friends for some young mother bonding - something she had thought she had lost leaving her friends in St. Louis.

Her old friends from Hogwarts were surprised to hear her tale in detail. She had gone to school while pregnant? That was foreign to

them. They all were impressed with her tale of her schooling and how she went into labor in history class.

"That would have made Professor Binns' class moderately interesting," Padma noted.

As mothers are wont to do, they spent the next hour or so talking about their children and Hermione realized she was enjoying herself despite the real risk that someone of them might spill it to the press. By the end, Hermione did not really care. She was back and the rest of magical Britain would just have to deal with that because she did not care. She had her Harry and her children. That was all that mattered in the end.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MONDAY, JULY 24, 2006 - THE SEVERUS SCHOOL, LONDON, U.K.

Following breakfast, Harry gathered everyone together to begin their day. Their first stop would be the Severus School to register the children and give them and the adults a tour. They walked towards the base of the U shaped cul-de-sac and met a few more of the neighbors on the way, none of them Hermione remembered or recognized. At the base was McMillan's Mart. Harry explained Ernie and Hannah came up with the idea for a food store following their two year's in the States. It was very successful, although nowhere near Piccadilly's as it was still limited to Britain. Across the street from McMillan's was a large, four story building with a noticeable play yard. It was the Severus School and was quite literally a short walk from Harry's house. Harry told them that the building was built just after the turn of the century and rebuilt after World War II as it had apparently been bombed during the Blitz. It closed down around 1990 and Harry acquired it in 1998. Although it looked old from the outside, as Hermione soon saw, the interior was modern and very high tech for a Primary School.

They went to the main office on the Ground Floor and met with a Mrs. Thatch who was in charge of admissions and scholarships. She explained that over half of each class were first generation magicals (Muggleborns) from the London area. Many took the tube to and from school. Of course, all primary school aged children from Grimmauld Place attended as well.

The school had five Forms or Grades with two classes in each Form. Still, there were over thirty classrooms. There was a large gym, a cafeteria for lunch and a library that impressed even Hermione.

Hermione learned that the school was very comparable to the school Daphne had attended in America. They taught the same types of magical and non-magical course at each year. Harry and Luna would be taking Math (addition and subtraction), Reading, Writing and Penmanship, "History" - although this was a very basic course that focused on non-magical Britain, a very basic science course and an arts course. On the magical side, they would take a course that was designed to develop mind magic and wandless technique, a course on magical history and society, a course on

magical plants and animals, and a course that taught potions technique, although students in First Form would not actually make real potions.

For Daphne, entering her Third Form, the magical courses resembled what Hermione took her first year at Hogwarts. As Daphne would be studying actual spell casting, she needed her own wand, which was where they would be heading next. What surprised Hermione was that the Statute for the Reasonably Restriction of Underage Sorcery had been repealed. Children could practice magic at home. By the time their child started school, non-magical parents knew enough to supervise their children's homework. Unless they were somewhere heavily warded against non-magical intrusion (like Grimmauld Place), wands were not to be used outside or in front of non-magicals who did not know about magic.

"And where will they be by the time they start secondary school?" Hermione asked.

"On the non-magical side, same as they should be if they attended a non-magical school. Magically? They'll take their O.W.L.s after their Third Year."

"And their N.E.W.T.s?"

"After Seventh. The magic instruction is spread out allowing both for more practice and for the student to sit for their G.S.C.E.s at the end of Fifth Year and A-Levels if they choose at the end of Seventh."

"And they attend Hogwarts for secondary school?"

"Not necessarily," Mrs. Thatch answered. "Your sister and Mr. Potter's boy will finish here in 2009. Beginning the next school year, Kings College here in London will be accepting Severus System students. Most likely, if you went to Hogwarts, your sister and children will be invited to attend, but you can also elect to attend Kings College."

"And the difference?"

"As Kings College is a day school, obviously it's far less expensive. From an educational standpoint, the only distinction between the two today is there is a Severus System Track at Hogwarts and there's

not one at Kings. The Severus students routinely outperform their peers. However, if you throw aside the Severus System scores, the school are comparable in terms of quality of education."

Hermione nodded, not necessarily in agreement. The idea of sending her sister and children away to boarding school for nine to ten months of the year was not a pleasant one in her opinion. True, she had gone there. Now she wonders what would have happened if her parents had known about Kings. Back then, the students were divided up before the letters of invitation were sent. Apparently, that was no longer really the case.

"Harry?" Hermione asked. "I know it's a bit early, but what are your thoughts about sending Teddy to Hogwarts?"

"You mean aside from the fact that his parents, grandparents and Dad went there?"

Hermione nodded.

"It Hogwarts was as closed now as it was when I went there and I knew of Kings, Teddy would go to Kings."

"What do you mean?"

"All Hogwarts students now have their weekends free for the most part. They are required to be at the school for Quidditch Matches and if they are serving a detention, but otherwise they can leave Friday after their last class and return Sunday evening before curfew."

"And where would they go?"

"Home, if they want. That or their parents can visit them for the weekend in Hogsmeade. On the days of a Quidditch Match, Hogsmeade is filled to bursting with families."

"And where do they stay? It's not like there's a lot of rooms for let..."

"Not when we were there, no. There's now a large resort hotel on the Black Lake not far from either the school or the town. Over a thousand rooms, I'm told."

"A resort?"

"Change in school weekend policy created the initial demand," Harry said. "More recently, the Black Lake region has become a summer holiday destination as well. Hogsmeade as more than doubled in size due to the tourism."

"Really?"

"We'll be staying there for a couple of nights this week."

"Harry, you are not seriously thinking of that as my surprise..."

"No!" Harry laughed. "Tomorrow and Wednesday nights. We're visiting Hogsmeade and Hogwarts on Wednesday."

"Oh."

"Having stayed there, I can assure you it's an excellent hotel."

Hermione nodded. She decided to reserve judgment on that.

After registering for the fall term and a full tour of the school with Teddy doing most of the talking, Harry announced it was time for look for some lunch. This earned a curious glance from Hermione, but all Harry would do in reply was wink. He led the family another three blocks away from their home and into Camden Towne proper. It had been a run down part of London years ago, but was now a vibrant shopping area - so popular that the Camden Towne Underground Station was exit only during the peak shopping hours of Sunday. There were few "chain" stores or restaurants, rather each was a small boutique or small family run or chef owned eatery. The selection of wares for sale could best be described as eclectic. Shops lined the main road and then continued on each bank of an old barge canal that had once transported good to and from long gone factories. Hermione thought the place was "vibrant," and being within a short walk from their home?

Harry selected a bistro he and Teddy liked and explained they came here quite often, even if all they did was walk around. The food was very good and yet inexpensive and they sat outside in the lovely weather. Once the kids were properly fed and watered, Harry announced it was time to head "Downtown." He would later tell them

the term was a euphemism for Diagon Alley that magicals used in the non-magical world. Years ago it was not that big a deal. But since the war, more and more magicals, mostly the young people, had begun spending time in the non-magical world at least for shopping, dining and entertainments.

They walked the couple of blocks from where they had lunch to the Camden Towne Underground Station. This was yet another of Harry's subtle introduction for the youngsters from the States into London. As a Londoner, the Tube was a necessity. Teddy explained how to read the Tube maps to the other children and said they would be taking the North Line (labeled in Black) south to the Charring Cross Road Station which was a block from their destination.

Harry bought each of the Grangers their own "Oyster" card. While there was something similar when Hermione was last in London, this was more advanced. It served in place of a ticket and was like a debit card. So long as there was money in the account, the holder could use the card for the Underground and the iconic London buses and other means of public transport as well. Harry and Teddy were frequent users of the Underground, so naturally they had their own cards.

A handful of stops later and they were at Charring Cross Road. From the entrance to the Underground station it was but a short walk to the plain door that was the entry into The Leaky Cauldron and Diagon Alley beyond. Before setting out this morning, Harry had spoken with Rose and Hermione about how they would "manage" Diagon Alley. Both Teddy and Daphne needed their wands, but it was not necessary to purchase them together. In fact, Ollivanders really could not hold more than a handful of people at a time, as in more than three. So, upon entering The Leaky Cauldron, the group would split up. Hermione would take Harry and Luna, show them the Alley and shop for books - naturally. Rose would take Daphne to buy a wand and would meet up with Hermione at Madam Malkin's for the children's school robes. Harry and Teddy would do their own shopping, including buying Teddy's wand. But Harry had other purchase in mind for the Grangers and really did not want them with him when he made them. Besides, Harry and Teddy in Diagon Alley would not seem out of sorts and Harry doubted many would realize that Hermione was who she was.

Rose and Daphne's first stop was Ollivanders. They entered and it was just as Rose remembered from when she and her Husband had brought Hermione to buy her wand. The place still felt old, creepy and cluttered.

"Ah good afternoon," a voice called from the back of the shop. The two watched as an old man in faded and equally ancient wizards robes approached them from between shelved stacked with boxes. "Oh my, Mrs. Granger I presume? It has been years."

"Y-you remember me?"

"Just as I remember every wand I ever sold, so I remember every customer who ever made a purchase. Summer of '91, correct? A vine wand with dragon heartstring? For your daughter Hermione, yes?"

"I believe that's right, Sir. How can you..."

"Remember? No idea really. I cannot even remember having breakfast this morning, but... Well, it's neither here nor there. Can I hope that the foul rumors regarding Hermione are false?"

"Rumors?"

"Mostly that she is no longer amongst the living. There are other ones that are worse."

"Oh, yes. She's fine."

"Indeed. So. What brings you round to my shop after all these years?"

"Hermione always swears by her wand. She says yours are the best and as my daughter Daphne is set to start school..."

"Severus System?"

"Yes."

"You have a copy of your registration form?"

"Here," Rose said handing the man a copy. "Why do you need the form?"

The man raised an eyebrow. "It has been a while since you are upon these shore, has it not?"

"We've been living abroad. This is Daphne's first time in Britain."

"And my guess would be either the United States or Canada, judging by your speech?"

Rose nodded.

"Where magical education is both compulsory and begins at age six, with wands at age eight. Yes, the Severus System follows the American style. But not all attend. When Lord Potter first obtained an exemption to allow students at his school to obtain wands early, there were many who tried to take advantage. Still are a few fool enough to try. That's why we make sure your child is indeed registered. Now, as to her wand.

"Now young Miss Granger," the man said as he came from behind the counter, "are you left or right handed?"

"Right," Daphne said, "why?"

"Because, although you might not be able to tell by looking," he continued as he took a tape measure to her right arm, "there are left and right handed wands. When you have trained long enough and the wand is fully bound to your magic, you can use either hand. But until then, a left handed wand would not do at all. Now, when was your birthday?"

"April 10th, 1998."

"Be back momentarily," he said heading back amongst the shelves.

"Is it me or is he creepy?" Daphne whispered.

"He was even creepier when your sister got her wand," Rose whispered back.

"I think we can begin with these," the man said as he came back with about eight boxes in his arms.

"You don't know which one will work?" Daphne asked.

"I have an idea, but no I do not nor cannot know for certain."

"Why not?"

"Because it is the wand that chooses the witch, Miss. Not the other way around. Well, I'm not sure the wand really chooses any more. But it is a good analogy. Has something to do with the magic in the wand and the magic of its user, that much is certain. Now here you go," he said handing Daphne a long wand.

"Alder wood and a dual core: hippogriff hair and feather, 12 ½ inches."

"I felt something," Daphne gasped.

"Give it a waive," the shopkeeper implored.

Daphne did as she was told and a bright light and shower of sparks issued from the tip of the wand.

"Oh my!" the shopkeeper exclaimed. "A perfect match on the first go. It's been years and years since that has happened. Excellent."

"Who was the last one?" Daphne asked.

"Oddly enough, your sister," the man said. "Then again, maybe it's not odd at all. Well then, good show."

"Mrs. Granger that'll be sixteen six and ten, please?"

"Erm, sorry, been a while."

"Ah! Sixteen Galleons, Six Sickles and Ten Knuts."

"Oh yes of course," Rose said. Fortunately, Harry had given them Galleons before leaving the house.

Daphne held the box containing her new wand as they stepped back into the Alley. As they headed further into the Alley they passed Harry and Teddy who obviously were heading to buy Teddy's wand. Daphne marveled at all the old buildings that made up the commercial center of Magical London.

"These are old," she said.

"Indeed they are," Rose said. "Janie once told me this Alley has been around since the 1300's and is pretty much the way it was then."

"Except for that," Daphne said pointing to a much newer building that towered over the Alley. The sign told them it was Piccadilly's.

"Except for that," Rose agreed as they reached the robe maker's shop. To Rose's surprise, Hermione was already waiting for them.

"That was quick," Hermione said as Rose and Daphne entered. "First go," Rose said, "just like her big Sis."

"That's wonderful," Hermione said.

"Surprised you're here so fast," Rose said to her older daughter. "You can spend hour in a bookstore."

"I was actually looking for a particular book and they did not have it," Hermione said.

"Oh?"

"Eros..."

"Ah."

"So, robes then?" Hermione said to everyone, "then ice cream?"

"Yay!" the three little ones exclaimed.

The point of their trip into London was not to spend the day shopping, rather to introduce Daphne, Harry and Luna to their new city and that necessarily included the trip to Diagon Alley. They had to buy the wands and robes, but the rest of their school supplied

could wait until later in the summer and the Severus School provide students with their course books. Once the robes were purchased, Rose, Hermione and the kids headed over to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor for ice cream and because it was a convenient place to meet up with Harry when he was done with his shopping.

As they approached the shop, they heard a squeal and saw a had waiving at them frantically. It was Lavender, they could tell and she was not alone. Ron was with her along with three other adults. Hermione thought she recognized one of them, but was not sure. Sighing, she led her family to their table where room was made for the new arrivals.

"Janie," Lavender said, "it's so good to see you so soon!"

"Thanks Lavender," Hermione replied.

"Oh, and Rose, my Mum wanted me to tell you if I saw you first that she had a wonderful time in New York. We all did, thanks."

"It was a wonderful time," Rose admitted.

"Oh silly me!" Lavender said. "Where are my manners. Okay, you all know Ron here. The charming woman to his right is Jena Dursley. She's married to Harry's Cousin."

"A pleasure," Jena said. Hermione could tell that at least Jena had no idea who she was. "And to my left is Astoria Malfoy..."

"Really?" Rose said. "We've been exchanging e-mails for weeks!"

"You must be Rose then," Astoria said. She had a very friendly voice.

"And finally her Husband Draco."

"It's been a while," Hermione said cautiously.

"You're looking well - er - Janie," Draco said.

"Thanks."

"I was so pleased when Harry told me. I never wanted any of those vile rumors about you to be true..."

"What rumors, Mommy?" Luna asked.

"Apparently some people thought I was dead."

"Oh. That's not very nice," she added with a pout.

"No, it's not."

"I did like the space alien story, though," Draco added.

"And what one was that?" Hermione asked.

"That you were really a scout from another galaxy sent to earth to find signs of intelligent life. Once you were convinced there wasn't any, you went home. As I understand it, that one came close to the truth?"

"That I couldn't stay here?" Hermione replied. "That was the truth back then."

"Anyway, Jena this is Jeanie, her mother Rose, sister Daphne and her two adorable kids Harry and Luna."

Jena's eyes opened with surprise. "Wow! Speak of the devil, as it were."

"What?" Hermione asked.

"Oh, this is just the most recent meeting of the Get Harry Hitched Society. I see he's made it official..." Lavender said indicating the ring on Hermione's left hand.

Hermione nodded with a smile.

"When?"

"Was it romantic?" Astoria asked.

"Saturday night and yes, very," Hermione replied. "After a lovely dinner and some dancing, he proposed atop the Millennium Wheel."

"Ronnie did that for me a few years ago. Perfect place," Lavender said. "I mean sure, we were married but he had never got me an engagement ring and he was starting to be what he always could have been. I think our Little Rosie came into being when I rewarded him later that night," she whispered.

"Get Harry Hitched Society?" Hermione asked before she might be forced to explain certain things to her sister and kids.

"Oh yes," Lavender said, "Astoria is your Coordinator and we've all been helping out in one way or another."

"Really?"

"Oh yes," Jena said. "I run a travel business and all the travel arrangements and tour packages for the overseas guests were handled by my firm."

"Lavender and Draco have been our disinformation campaigners," Ron said. "They got the gossip reporters and paparazzi running around California looking for a blonde bint named 'Janie'."

"Never underestimate the gullibility of that branch of the Fourth Estate," Draco said. "That Skeeter Cow will believe anything."

"You should know, dear," Astoria said, "you're the one who tipped her off about the space alien story."

"That was you?" Ron and Hermione both asked.

"One of my finer moments I might add," Draco chuckled. "Got the article framed on my office wall."

"My brother George will be green with envy if he learns that," Ron said.

"I thought it was a prank worthy of him at the time," Draco chuckled.

"Is Harry here?" Lavender asked.

"He's around," Hermione replied. "They're getting Teddy his wand today."

"Might take a while then," Draco said. "I went through over twenty before I got a match."

"Twenty-five myself, just before Third Year."

"Why then?" Jena asked.

"I was using my older brother's first wand at first."

"And at the beginning of Second Year," Draco said, "he and Harry stole his dad's flying car and crashed it into the Whomping Willow at school. Weaselby broke his wand in the wreck. Had trouble all year with that stick."

"You stole a flying car and wrecked it?" Astoria asked.

"Surely I told you that one," Draco said.

Astoria shook her head.

"Harry and I could not get onto Platform 9 3/4," Ron said. "Later found out it was an over eager elf that blocked the Portal. We missed our train for school and..."

"Forgot that your parent's could apparate or about the Floo or anything," Hermione huffed.

"Well ... yeah. No. I didn't. I just thought it would be cool to fly the car and Harry did nothing to stop me."

"That Willow sure did," Draco chuckled. "Heard it beat that car into a pulp."

"And your wand?" Astoria asked.

"We were going to crash. I was trying to make it stop. Broke it."

"Must have made classes unbearable that year."

"It was annoying," Ron admitted, "but it worked out in the end."

"How?"

"That fraud Lockhart tried to erase our memories with my wand. Wiped his own instead. Last I heard he's still in St. Mungo's."

"That was you?" Draco asked almost in awe.

Ron shook his head. "My wand. All I did was stand there."

"Still... Twenty-five tried?"

Ron shrugged. "Ask Harry how many tried he had to go through before he found his wand. I think it was like fifty."

"More than that," a voice said. Everyone looked up and saw Harry and Teddy had arrived. "Closer to a hundred, really," Harry added. "I was beginning to think someone was playing a cruel joke on me."

"Seven tries," Teddy said proudly. "Alder with dragon scale!"

"Nice," Draco added.

"One try," Daphne said. "First wand I was handed. Just like my big sister!"

"Whoa!" Ron gaped. "Bet that doesn't happen much!"

"It was creepy, though," Daphne said.

"That hasn't changed," Harry admitted. "But he seems to have mellowed."

"How so?" Hermione asked.

"Didn't feel the hair standing up on the back of my head like the last time," Harry said. Hermione could only shake her head at this.

"Ice crème?" Hermione asked. "We promised the kids."

"Oh right. I'll attract the server." Moments later a server arrived and took their orders.

"So Harry," Lavender said, "you two set a date yet?"

"She's agreed to the primary," Harry replied.

"Oh that's wonderful!"

"Good thing your Mum and you were so decisive," Astoria added. "Had at least two clients this year who were still trying to decide things practically right up unto the bride had to walk down the aisle."

Hermione shrugged. "We like what we saw in your catalog."

"Where's Dudley?" Harry asked.

"It's that time of the summer Harry. He's taking off starting Wednesday, but there's a lot of work getting ready for next week," Jena replied.

"Next week?" Hermione asked.

"New student orientation at Hogwarts," Jena said. "Parents and this year's First Year students will arrive for a three day orientation. They'll visit the school, classrooms, all the dorms, Hogsmeade, the zoo all that."

"That's new," Hermione observed.

"Dudley's idea. Been doing it for a few years. Dudley got the sense that most First Years were really lost when they arrived fresh off the train. Thought it got in the way of their education. It seems to work. The students already know their way around and the marks bear out that it was a good idea."

"I still can't get over that he's a wizard."

"It's a real interesting story, really," Jena said, "but I'll let Dudley tell you when you meet him."

"Why?"

"First of all, it's his story and he is much better at telling it than I am."

"Makes sense."

"So," Lavender said, "you meet anyone since you've been back?"

"Please don't say Ginny," Ron said under his breath.

"As a matter of fact I have," Hermione replied, "and no not Ginny."

"Good."

"Why?"

"She's been mental for ages," Ron said, "but I really think she's gone completely 'round the twist now."

"Her scoring is way off," Draco nodded.

"You're talking Quidditch, right?" Ron asked.

Draco nodded. "Yeah. Saw that too. If you meant her other hobby, that's actually gone up from what I've heard."

"So who'd you meet?" Lavender asked trying to steer the conversation away from child sensitive material."

"Parvati, Padma, Susan, Hannah, Daphne and some others."

"Daphne?" Astoria asked, "as in my sister?"

Hermione nodded as the server arrived with their orders and the kids began devouring their treats.

"Well the cat's gonna be out of the bag," Lavender said.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked.

"While I am sworn to secrecy and to keep all but a trusted few in Britain from knowing you two are an item, Parvati and Daphne are not. They were the biggest gossips at school."

"So were you, I recall," Harry chided.

"Emphasis on the past tense," Lavender said. "I needn't tell you there's been far too much drama in Ron's and my life. Lost interest in such trivialities."

"Where?" Astoria asked again. "Where'd you meet them?"

"Ran into them at the park 'cross from the house yesterday."

"Well, once you get to the Manor, no worries," Draco said. "Hopefully the god awful press will be slow to take notice."

"Haven't seen any around here," Harry noted.

"The bad ones are off in America," Draco said. "Hopefully it'll be a few days before they can do anything."

Harry nodded.

"I really don't want our kids exposed to that," Harry said.

"I think not," Draco said. "They pull with them what they tried to do with Teddy and your annulment and you'll finally own the Daily Prophet."

"Wh-what they do with Teddy?" Hermione said,

"Not long after Teddy came to live with me they began a smear campaign. We think Ginny was behind it but can't prove it."

"Smear campaign?"

"Accused me of being a bad parent and stuff. Rubbish as usual."

"That's horrible!"

"Cost the Prophet a cool million to settle that case," Harry said. "Skeeter was suspended for a year. Still, they never seem to learn."

"Skeeter's the worst of them," Lavender agreed. "And the good news is she took her whole department with her to hunt for 'Janie'."

"So she'll be on the next plane back," Harry groaned.

"Doubt it," Lavender replied.

"Why?"

"Her boss hates her and has been itching to fire her for years. Thanks to our Harry here."

"Harry?" Rose asked.

"Sued the Prophet for libel three times and won," Draco answered. "Cost the paper and its investors millions. All three times it was Skeeter's work."

"Anyway," Lavender said, "seems I am related to her boss. He's like a Second Cousin or something. I tipped him off about 'Janie' and also that it was a false lead. He sent Skeeter away that day. He has told me that if a story within her department should break while she's away, he's going to give her the sack since she was so eager to go looking for 'Janie'. She didn't even have a good lead, because there isn't one."

"What are you saying, Lav?" Ron asked.

"If the editor of the Prophet sat down with us right now, nothing would happen yet," Lavender said. "Harry?"

"Yes?"

"Will you have press at the picnic?"

"The usual."

"So the Quibbler will scoop the Prophet both on the Wizarding Wedding of the Century and the Return of Hermione!"

"Quibbler?" Hermione asked.

"Luna's father is the only press I invite to any of my functions," Harry explained. "At least as far as I am concerned, he has never done me wrong."

"He hasn't," Draco agreed.

"So, we can get the best of both worlds," Ron surmised. "A wonderful wedding and picnic - my first by the way, Harry picnic, not wedding - and the end of Rita Skeeter."

"You planned this?" Hermione asked Harry.

"I merely suggested it," Harry replied. "The plot is far too Slytherin for me. That's Draco and Lav's department."

"So," Lavender said again changing topic, "you pick your Bridesmaids yet?"

"Yes, and sorry Lavender."

"Oh, I really wasn't expecting," she said in mock disappointment. "No really, who?"

"Well, I wanted my Mum here but..."

"But I said as her mother it was my duty to sit in the front row and cry my eyes out in happiness," Rose quipped in reply.

"My Bridesmaids are six of my long term friends from the States," Hermione replied, "along with my sister and daughter. Four of us attended prep school and where there when I gave birth to my babies and the other two I met at University."

"And Harry?" Rose asked. "Got the groomsmen sorted out?"

Harry nodded. "My cousin Dudley will be best man. He did a good job as a last second stand in the last time."

"Sorry," Ron said softly.

"Of course my sons Teddy and Little Harry. Then there's my long time partner Kevin Malone from the American FBMI, Draco - can't break up that team, Dean Thomas whose my best Agent, Ernie McMillan from our Young Turk days and Ron."

"Ron?" Hermione asked.

"I was short one. After New York I figured why not and the fact that Ron and Draco haven't killed each other today bodes well."

"We do have them on a tight leash," Lavender said.

"Thanks," Harry replied. "I'll remember not to have them standing next to one another."

"Who's going to give the bride away?" Astoria asked.

"Well, it can't be my Dad," Hermione said softly. "He died years ago."

"I'm sorry."

"What about mine," Ron piped in.

"Umm," Hermione began.

"He never put up with my crap or Ginny's either," Ron continued. "he always stood by you, even when you were away. You should have seen the rows he had with Mum about you. When Harry wanted out of that so called marriage, Dad was on his side from the start. I'm sure he'd be thrilled."

"Um."

"We don't have to tell him," Ron said. "He's going to be at the picnic anyway."

"I - I think that'd be nice." Hermione had to admit she always liked Arthur Weasley even if he was a bit dim when it came to the non-magical world.

"I still can't believe that you agreed to the short date."

"There were extenuating circumstances," Hermione began.

"Extenuating or not," Rose said, "I would have pulled you in kicking and screaming!"

"Mother?"

"I thought Harry's plan was one of the sweetest things I ever heard of, Janie. They all have worked so hard to make it special. Had you balked..."

"I would have caved," Hermione said tearing up a little. "I agree with that, Mum, but..."

"But you wanted it moved up anyway 'cause you're expecting," Rose said.

"Expecting?" several voices asked.

Hermione nodded.

"What's that mean, Mummy?" Luna asked.

"Grown up thing."

"Oh."

"When did this happen?" Ron asked before getting an elbow in the ribs from Lavender.

"Obviously in New York," Hermione said in exasperation.

"When did you find out?" Jena asked.

"A week ago," Hermione admitted.

"Did you tell Harry before or after he gave you that ring?"

"After," Hermione said.

"Not that it would have mattered," Harry added. "I think she hooked me fourth year. Just took her time in landing me."

"That makes more sense," Ron said.

"What?"

"I'd rather think it failed with Ginny 'cause you were elsewhere as it were than because of what she has become."

"Delicately put, Ron," Lavender said.

"You see? I can learn!"

"That remains to be proven conclusively," Draco quipped. "Are congratulations in order, you two?" he asked of Harry and Hermione.

They nodded. "Thanks," Harry said for both of them.

"You think we should announce at the wedding?" Harry asked.

"Do you want to?" Hermione asked.

Harry nodded eagerly. "Okay, but after the 'I dos'."

"Of course."

"Does Parvati know this?" Lavender asked.

"Nope," Hermione said.

"Oh goodie!"

OFFICE OF THE DAILY PROPHET LATER THAT DAY.

"Boss?" the young man asked.

"What is it Stebbins?" the Editor-in-Chief replied.

"It's - er Stephens, Sir."

"Whatever. I'm busy. This better be good."

"I saw her!"

"Who?"

"In Diagon Alley, Sir, I saw her!"

"And I asked who!"

"Granger."

The editor rolled his eyes. "If I had a knut for every supposed sighting, I wouldn't have to do this for a living."

"But I did!"

"Look, Stebbins..."

"STEPHENS!"

"Whatever. You started Hogwarts in 1999. You just finished. Granger was long gone by then. You've never met her. How can you be sure?"

"She looked like her - well sort of."

"I've been dealing with sort of for years with Skeeter. What proof do you have?"

"She was with Potter!"

"How do you mean?" the Editor asked bored. "Like all over him or what?"

"No, nothing like that. They were just at the ice cream parlor with some others. Draco Malfoy for one. I thought I saw the owner of Piccadilly's, some kids..."

"This tells me nothing. Potter having lunch with people we know he's connected with? So what?"

"But sir?"

"Look, Skeeter took her whole office with her to find that 'Janie' woman. You want me to call her back for a meeting in public at a popular ice cream parlor?"

"Maybe it was her?"

"Who?"

"This Janie woman?"

"She have blonde hair? Fake boobs?"

"No, it was brown and curly and I didn't check out the other part."

"It's nothing."

"Perhaps I could..."

"You're entry level! If there were something there, and there's not, I wouldn't send you! You want a career in this field?"

Stephens nodded.

"Then when the boss says no he means it!"

"Yes sir! But what if?"

"It's on Skeeter's head if there is something there and if we get scooped. She took her whole team! This issues is closed!"

"Yes sir."

Elsewhere, at the desk of Rita Skeeter, a phone was ringing. Throughout most of her career, Rita did not even know what a phone was. It was only recently that the Prophet had them installed and she was still clueless about them. Her voicemail had over 3,000 unheard messages because she had no idea she had it, much less how to access it. She had a cell phone with her, also with a couple thousand unheard messages. In that case, however, she had never figured out how to turn the thing on.

At the other end of the line, Parvati hung up - again. She had the scoop of the century and Skeeter would pay her top Galleons for it, but the bint would not answer her bloody phone. The hell with her, Parvati thought. Her loss.

Daphne had left her sixteenth voicemail for Skeeter since she had met Harry and Hermione in the park. Again, nothing. She seriously considered cancelling her subscription to that paper.

As Harry would later say, the group made it through their hours in Diagon Alley relatively unmolested. There was an awkward moment at the ice cream parlor when Narcissa Malfoy saw him. Ever since the Final Battle, whenever she saw him she fussed over him, kissed him (always on the cheeks) and thanked him profusely. Draco never could understand how Harry could put up with it and certainly did not buy his answer:

"You get used to it in time."

She spent several minutes talking with Harry - as was her norm - and was introduced to Hermione. She was not told any details but seemed happy for Harry.

"Oh, it's so good to see you've finally met a decent one, Harry." Cissy said. "That last one was all wrong for you. I knew it all along," she insisted.

"Pity no one told me," Harry groped.

"Wasn't my place then" Cissy said. "You do realize how lucky you are?" she asked Hermione.

"Everyday," Hermione replied.

"Good."

Aside from Mrs. Malfoy, nothing happened and Harry's new family took the Tube back to Camden town and walked to their home unscathed just in time for dinner.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2006 - 12 GRIMMAULD PLACE, LONDON, U.K.

Tuesday had been a very different day than the day before. Both Teddy and Daphne had been upset that their new wands were locked away for the time being, but there was not time enough to teach them properly so the adults had put their feet down. Fortunately, there were no temper tantrums, but the two were a bit surly the next morning.

The new family spent Tuesday seeing the real London. They had gone to the Millennium Wheel to begin with a birds eyes view of the heart of the venerable capital. Just as their car was reaching the highest part of their ride, Harry told the children that this was where he formally proposed to Hermione just a few days ago, earning a sigh from the girls, a kiss from Hermione and retching sounds from both of the boys.

While they went to many places that day, the three that the kids seemed to like the most were the Wheel, the Tower of London and Windsor Castle, which they saw in the afternoon. Of course, none of this was new to Teddy, but he liked playing the knowledgeable big brother role. The Granger Children were pleased that at least the Castle part of their Dad (or soon to be big Brother-in-Law's) story of what his country was like was real. When they were told they were going to see another castle the next day - a magical one, the children were thrilled. Then Harry threw in the kicker: dragons. They were going to see real, live dragons!

They were going to travel by floo powder to the Black Lake Resort outside of Hogsmeade. Harry told them this night that this was a special treat for Rose Granger. Rose had been "in" the magical world for eighteen years now and had never seen the school or village her daughter had attended or written about. Hermione, of course, had left before a lot of the changes occurred in the area. There was no resort and there certainly was no zoo.

Teddy had seen the zoo before and Hogsmeade, but he had never actually been in Hogwarts Castle. He declared the zoo totally brilliant and said that the dragons were the coolest thing there was.

Hogsmeade was okay, in his opinion and the castle was amazing, but he had never been inside and they were going to get to do that.

Teddy, of course, was a veteran of Floo travel. Hermione had done it in the past as had Rose on a handful of occasions. The rest of the Grangers had never done it before. There was no floo connection where they lived and no real floo network to speak of. Floo networks, not unlike subways, were mostly in the eastern United States although San Francisco and Santa Fe were said to have small ones. Because the Granger children had never floored before, each was with an adult along with their overnight bags. Rose had Daphne, Hermione had Little Harry and Harry had Luna. Teddy, of course, was allowed to Floo on his own.

Teddy went first. Grabbing a pinch of floo powder, which looked a lot like ash, he said "BLACK LAKE RESORT" dropped the powder into the magical fireplace and disappeared in a flash of green flames. One by one, the three adults and three children followed.

They stepped out into a huge and opulent lobby. It was almost overwhelming with the wood paneling, the inlaid stone floor, the rich furnishing and what surprised Hermione the most, abstract art. While not unknown overseas, she had never seen it in a magical place in Britain. They were always too literal in their taste for art. Yet here, she could be at any top hotel in the world. She watched as Harry put Luna down and then walked up to the front desk.

"Yes sir?" the House Elf at the front desk said as Harry stepped up. "How may I be of service this fine evening? And I do hope you have a reservation, Sir. Height of the season and we are booked solid."

"Potter," Harry replied.

"Ah yes. Four bedroom balcony suite with views of the Lake, Castle and town, very good Sir. Two night?"

Harry nodded.

"How many keys will you require, Sir?"

"Um - four should do."

"Will your party require assistance with their bags?"

"No, thank you."

"I see you've also reserved a ten person Cart for the morning?"

Harry nodded.

"Going up to the Castle or the Zoo I take it?"

Harry nodded.

"Interested in any of our package deals?"

"Deals?"

"Yes sir! You can play with the Giant Squid - he's quite friendly. Dive on the Merepeople Village for a spot of shopping that cannot be done above water. There's sailing on the lake. Acromantula hunting in the Forbidden Forest..."

"Acromantula hunting?"

"All the rage for the avid sportsman, Sir. A Centaur guide leads you to your prey and you kill it and keep the goodies Sir! No limit. Kill as many as you want! They are a right nuisance, Sir. But, the guides won't protect you. Those bloody giant spiders are right nasty. Still, loads of fun I am told - 'less you die of course, Sir."

"Erm, no thanks."

"You keep what you can harvest from your kills, Sir."

"No thanks."

"Right you are, Sir. Should I get a reservation in the dining room for your party, or would room service be acceptable?"

"I think room service will do,"

"Yes Sir! Here are your keys. Room 1217. Elevators to the left."

"Thank you," Harry said.

"Thank you, Sir!"

WENDESDAY, JULY 26, 2006 - EMAMNDER PITCH, HOLYHEAD, WALES, U.K. - HOME PITCH OF THE HOLYHEAD HARPIES

Ginny Weasley found herself in her Coach's office at 7:00 in the morning on her day off. She had received a letter from the front office demanding her presence. For now, she was alone cooling her heels as it were and she as annoyed as she had planned to use this day to either find Harry or find someone to help her get Harry back. The door opened and three older women entered. Ginny recognized all of them. One was the Head Coach of the Harpies: Ingrid Stenson. The next was her former Captain who had retired to the front office and was now Director of Team Operation: Gwenog Jones. The last one was a disturbing surprise. She was one of the Team owners: Anges Rowle.

She had heard about meetings like this before and knew it was not a good sign for her. This was some sort of disciplinary meeting at best or termination of her contract at worst and she knew it. She could not for the life of her figure out why she was here. While she knew her play was off, she still was the best and most productive Chaser on the English National Team, where she was temporarily assigned for the World Cup and that the team was still in the hunt.

"Good morning Ginny," her Coach said in a calm voice.

"Morning Coach," she replied.

"I bet you're wondering why we are all gathered here today?"

Ginny nodded.

"No doubt you are aware that your performance in World Cup competition has slumped noticeably?"

"I'm just in a slump is all."

"Indeed," Gwenog said in a disbelieving tone.

"We have received several letters from Brian Johnson very recently regarding you, Ginny," her coach continued.

Johnson was the Coach of the English National Team.

"He is understandably concerned," Coach Stenson continued. "His letters state that while he has always had reservations regarding our players, at least in the beginning he was willing to overlook your social life because your performance was top notch. But with your steady decline, he believes some sort of remedial action is necessary. If this was the Tornadoes, you would have at least been demoted to Reserve by now, but player changes on the National Team require approval from their own club."

"You're going to demote me?" Ginny gasped in shock.

"We are going to determine if a less drastic alternative is available," Gwenog said. "Coach Johnson feels you are not taking advantage of your day off like you used to and are supposed to."

"How - how so?"

"The day off is to allow you to rest and recover, Ginny. I know you know that. We expect you to relax, not go gallivanting all over the country like someone on a quest and getting into two or three arguments a day. Until a few weeks ago, you arrived at practice on Thursdays rested, relaxed and eager to play. In recent weeks, you've been exhausted, moody, and somewhat insubordinate in attitude and your play both at practice and on the pitch has declined noticeably. Even the press has picked that up. Mind telling us what you've been up to?"

Ginny shook her head. It really was none of their business.

"You do realize the Harpies are a unique team in the League, don't you?"

Ginny nodded. Of course they were unique. They had never in their history had a male player!

"Do you know why?"

Ginny did not react to this question as she felt it was rhetorical.

"We are unique because we are the only team without a 'Morals' clause in our Player Contracts. There is a reason for this. Since its inception, this Team has hired female player no other team would touch. Not all of our hires fall into that category. At first, you did not. But over half of our players by virtue of their sexual preferences and partners violate the standard Morals clause almost every night. They cannot play for any other team in the League.

"Now, while you are definitely not a lesbian, your own promiscuous behavior over the last several years would violate the standard Morals Clause. Do you know what that means?"

Ginny shook her head.

"Despite your potential Hall of Fame career to date, your off the pitch activities ensures that no other team will hire you if you're let go by us - ever!"

Ginny paled.

"While we do not police the bedrooms where you spend your nights, you like all of our players are watched, Ginny."

Ginny's mouth dropped.

"We are acutely aware of the potential scandals our players social lives might generate and do our best to keep the press at bay. The only way to do that is to know all about your private life so we can conduct damage control when needed. Thus, we know of every man and woman you've had relations with since the day you first put on your uniform. And we also know you have not been resting as required on your days off in recent weeks.

"Are you going to tell us why you have not been getting your rest?"

Ginny shook her head.

"Very well then," Gwenog continued. "If you wish to continue playing professional Quidditch as a career, here are your conditions. You will spend every Wednesday from now until the end of the season relaxing. That means either in your flat or at a Spa. No traveling, no visiting your estranged family. No phone calls, floo calls, or parties. You will rest and sleep. That's it. Your social activities are restricted

to two nights a week and Tuesday, Wednesday and the night before any game may not be one of them."

"But..." Ginny began.

"No buts. This is not negotiable. It is a minor inconvenience at worst, Ginny. Far less severe than being demoted or dropped from the National Squad. But lest you misunderstand us, violate these terms and we will consider our personnel roster options."

Ginny knew this meant violate the terms and her Quidditch career would be over. She had a choice now. Lose Harry forever or lose her career forever. She wanted both. She now knew she could not have both. She knew without Quidditch she was nothing. She had always known she would never give up Quidditch, but to lose Harry? She had mapped out her entire professional life and Quidditch was her key, but she had to play for at least ten years for Hall of Fame consideration and she needed that ticket to move into any other related field. By going pro, she had practically given up on any real career outside of the sport. Her best employment options now would be as a shop girl, a job that required little magical skill. She could still go after Harry, she thought. She just had to wait until November when the season ended. Still, this was so unfair! But there was no choice really as she could not afford not to play.

"Do you accept these terms?" Gwenog asked.

Reluctantly, Ginny nodded.

"Good. Now go home and spend the day resting."

Ginny knew she would probably spend the day crying, but had no real choice. She stood and left to fulfill the terms of her agreement and returned to her flat.

WENDESDAY, JULY 26, 2006 - THE BLACK LAKE RESORT, HOGSMEADE, SCOTLAND, U.K.

One of the first thing Hermione noticed upon entering their suite of rooms at the Resort was that it had electricity and non-magical technology just like Grimmauld Place. Had she been paying attention in the Lobby, she might have noticed, but what finally tipped her off were light switches and a large television. Hogsmeade

Valley had been magical since the time of the founding of Hogwarts, she knew, and since that time few "Muggle" had ever entered the Valley. The only non-magical means of transport into the valley was on foot or horseback and one had to hike or ride for miles from the nearest "Muggle" town just to reach the valley proper. Even then, there were wards in place that deterred all but the most determined. Because it was all magical, there had never been electricity in the valley before, and now there was? Naturally, she asked Harry about this monumental change from the last time she was here a little over seven years ago.

To Hermione's surprise, the whole story began with Harry's Foundation and the opening of the Severus School. The School opened in the fall of 1999 with "Muggle-born" students ranging from the age of six to nine. Most were younger brothers and sisters of witches and wizards, but there were a few first time families in each of the four years. The Foundation's plans even then called for the use of Hogwarts as the Secondary School for these students as it was the only one that then had adequate space available for what was, in fact, another school. Harry had planned all along for an "orientation" for new families and students prior to the school year, which for his Severus Students would be the summer of 2001. Transportation for the "Muggle" family members was the main problem. While they could technically Floo to Hogsmeade, Harry doubted many would want to and was certain the Ministry would not allow it at the time. Apparition and Portkeys were also out of the question as the former would require perhaps as many as 100 side-along trips and the latter was regulated by the Ministry. Early on, Harry had contacted his friends in the Department of Magical Transportation about the possible use of the Hogwarts Express for the orientation and was told the Ministry, which controlled the Express, was not about to release it for that purpose. Just as he had in starting his school, Harry decided to work around the Ministry and its still institutional biases rather than through it.

In the summer of 2000, the Foundation purchased a modern, Muggle passenger train from the same company that supplied passenger rolling stock to National Rail. The train was "stock" and ran on electricity from overhead power lines. It was delivered to a site the Foundation purchased and Weasley Industries was contracted to consider various magical modifications. The contract specified that the train had to be able to run "the Muggle way," but should also have the ability to run magically and should, in all other

respects, have the enchantments that the Hogwarts Express had. Needless to say, George Weasley and his rapidly grown staff of employees jumped at the thought of creating such a hybrid.

Harry had thought it ludicrous that all students had to go to London just to get to Hogwarts and knew that if his system spread beyond London, parents would complain. After all, why should a family from Edinburgh, which was on the route the Hogwarts Express ran, have to travel all the way to London just to send their kid a couple of hundred miles at most? While Weasley Industries revamped their new toy, the Foundation built ten "Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " like stations between London and Hogsmeade along the same line used by the Hogwarts Express.

At about the same time as he bought the train, Harry realized he had to do something about lodging. Between the Hogs Head and Three Broomsticks, the closest things to a hotel in Hogsmeade, there were maybe fifty rooms and none of them were suitable for Muggles. Between his American wizard friends as well as several Muggle-born ex-pats who returned following the War, he began to see real potential in the valley. To his surprise, most of the valley was owned by the Potter Estate. While it was not costing him a knut to hold the land, it was also not making a knut and Harry was beginning to hate profitless properties. He saw the potential of a resort hotel - at least in the summer months. He knew it would cost a bloody fortune, especially as it was to cater to Muggles with magical children, and they would expect all the amenities, but he saw long term potential and, oddly enough, so did his Goblin financial advisors at Gringotts bank. Short term, he was going to lose a fortune on this. But the long term upside was interesting.

Thus, he built the hotel and a power plant to provided electricity. It was located in a cave out of sight. The generator was driven by a steam turbine. The "boiler" was fired by magic so there would be no impact to the local environment from the operation - as the valley was the potential draw. The hotel opened the day before the first Orientation in 2001. The London to Hogsmeade train arrived on time at Hogsmeade terminal with thirty-four families aboard. They were the first guest of the huge resort. What surprised Harry was that more than a handful saw the same potential in the valley as he did - at least for the magical world and those like them who lived on its edges as it were.

The open weekend policy for Severus Students in the fall of 2001 brought visitors back and when the first snows fell in November of that year, more ideas were hatched. In the summer of 2002, the first non-magical family moved to Hogsmeade. While Harry saw potential for summer recreation with the lake and the valley, this family saw winter potential, particularly since there was now electricity. Since that Summer, Hogsmeade Valley transformed from a sleepy village into the vacation destination of Magical Britain. That first Muggle family had money and built a ski resort in the mountains nearby, with the Black Lake Hotel as the lodgings. While old magical families could care less, the newer ones flocked in as soon as it opened in November 2002 as it turned out to be the best skiing in all of Britain.

New shops sprang up in Hogsmeade as the number of visitors escalated. The Foundation set architecture rules so as not to change the appearance of the village and a non-competition ordinance was enacted to protect the existing businesses. Still, the long term residents complained for a while. But when they began to see the money they were really making from the influx of visitors, the complaints stopped. Hagrid's zoo, the first and only of its kind in the world had begun drawing an international crowd. Since 2002, the permanent population of Hogsmeade and more than tripled and High Street in Hogsmeade was second only to Diagon Alley for shopping in Magical Britain. With the exception of a Wandmaker, a student for Hogwarts could purchase all of their supplies here. Oddly, the fact that many did had made no noticeable dent in Diagon Alley's business.

The original train line was now running daily from Hogsmeade to London with a northbound train from London to Hogsmeade. The original line ran through Aberdeen, Edinburgh, York, Oxford and six other stops to London. It was now called the "East Line." A year or so ago, the "West Line" began service. Again, that train ran daily from London to Hogsmeade Station, but it traveled through Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and other stops.

With the influx of Muggles and magical tourists, transport within the valley became a problem rapidly. There still were no roads into the valley for cars. Enter again, Weasley Industries who acquired and adapted several London buses for public transit. The buses ran on ambient magic and as the valley was one of the most magical in Europe, there was more than an abundance of energy to power the

fleet. Every major point in the valley, including Hogwarts itself was now on the bus routes.

Tradition was not ignored or abandoned. The thestral carriages still brought upper years to Hogwarts on September first. The First Years still traveled by boat to the School and the Hogwarts Express still ran. But for the students, Hogsmeade was a much more interesting and entertaining town. It had a cinema and everything! And none of them complained when it was deemed necessary to more than double the seating capacity of the Hogwarts Quidditch stands.

The resort was now near full all year round and there was demand for more rooms. There were two golf courses in the valley now that had become quite popular along with all the other tourist draws. Plans were already moving forward to build another hotel to accommodate demand. Hogsmeade was now fully electrified and this extended to Hogwarts Castle, at least with regard to the dormitories for the Severus students and the Non-Magical Studies classrooms.

Harry had literally sunk tens of millions of Galleons into this venture and never expected a return on his investment. It was all for what he considered his students and their families. He was stunned at what happened. He got the ball rolling before he left for two years in Atlanta and when he came back, finally, his account managers were excited even for Goblins. As he had a small piece in every new business by virtue of being the "landlord" and a major piece in the hotel, his money pit was proving to be a cash cow. No, he had not yet made up his full investment. But he would real soon. The Goblins were predicting that the valley would soon become his major source of profit as it was already his major source of income and that was saying a lot. And, of course, profit for Harry was profit for the Goblins and that was a good thing as well as he could continue his "get around the Ministry" tactics when needed without any complaints from Gringotts.

Hermione openly wondered how the wizarding world could accept such radical changes to a place that had not changed at all in hundreds of years. Her memory of British magicals was of a culture locked in the past and fearful if not terrified of any change, for better or worse. Harry simply observed that it is amazing what people will accept in a booming economy and Hogsmeade was just such an

economy. Having a business in Hogsmeade these days practically allowed you to mint your own Galleons.

The new family ate breakfast in their suite just as they had dinner. This was the peak of the summer season in Hogsmeade and while many of the guests probably had no idea who Hermione was, there were probably a few who did. Harry knew that this new Hogsmeade was far more popular with the non-magicals and first generation magicals than the Purebloods. Still, he wanted this to be as quiet as possible. This was a time he wanted with his new family and did not want to be mobbed with fans or well wishers. He certainly did not want that attention heaped upon Daphne or his children. Teddy hated it even if he was used to it and had suffered through it for as long as he could remember. The others? Harry knew they would have to deal with it too, but wanted to ease them into the life as far as he could.

The one thing about the valley Harry had not gotten around to telling Hermione about the night before were the Karts. As much as Harry would have loved to be able to drive his Aston Martin about the valley, he happened to agree with the "Old Timers" that bringing the internal combustion engine into the valley was not a good idea. Still, there were now a number of non-magical residents in the valley, not to mention first generation magicals. Add the tourists and there was a need for personal transportation that non-magicals could use. The bus line was fine, but it did not go everywhere.

Enter again Weasley Industries. In 2004, they introduced to the valley the Kart. George had gotten the idea from the golf carts that had been purchased for the first of the new golf courses. The Kart was another magical - non-magical hybrid. It was the "car" for the valley. It had a battery powered engine augmented by a Magical Induction Drive system. With a top speed of 40 kph, it was not exactly fast. Then again, there were few places where one could drive that fast. Most residents owned one now and several were for rent for visitors. Brightly colored, it came in three models that sat either up to six, nine or twelve. It could run for up to twelve hours without stopping in dry conditions and eight in snow as it had a snow feature that allowed it to skim or hover, thus sparing the local authorities the need to plow the gravel roads in the Valley. Harry had rented a three bench, nine passenger Kart for their visit.

The family piled into his Kart and headed off on a drive through the valley. The Kart was amazingly quiet. Harry deliberately drove to the far end of High Street Hogsmeade en route to his first stop of the day. The town had really grown, Hermione thought as they slowly progressed up the street as throngs of people milled about. There were stores that sold everything from souvenirs, to ski supplied to clothing. There was a large McMillian's and a Piccadilly's outlet along with more shops and restaurants than Hermione thought possible. Harry was not kidding. Aside from a wandmaker, there was more shopping here than in Diagon Alley. As they slowly reached the far end, she started to see the Hogsmeade she remembered. There was the Three Broomsticks, Hogshead Tavern, Madam Puddifoots, Dervish & Bangs, Honeydukes and others. The only thing that had really changed was Zonko's was now Weasley Wizarding Weases. But it was still a joke shop that catered to the students of Hogwarts.

What amazed Hermione was how the new Hogsmeade seemed to blend in with the old. Harry explained that this was on purpose. There was a strict building and architecture code in place that ensured that the village retained it's original character, one Harry fully supported.

"Toys!" Little Harry cried out.

Hermione looked and saw there was indeed a large toy store just past Honeydukes.

"Mom? Please? Please? Please? Please? Can we go there?"

"You behave," Harry began, "and we'll stop in before supper."

"Yay!"

"We have Hogwarts and the Zoo first," Harry concluded. As if on cue, they passed the last of the buildings and Hogwarts Castle came into full view.

Rose Granger had heard of this place for years. Hermione told her all she could about it and what it looked like going so far as to show her pictures. Nothing Rose had seen before matched the reality. It really was the most impressive castle she had ever seen.

"How can I see this?" she gasped. Rose knew that there were protections that were supposed to make her see a ruin or something.

"You're with us, Mum," Hermione said. "A non-magical can see it if she is with a magical."

"It's amazing!"

Hermione nodded. She was surprised that she felt a little weepy. This was where she had fallen in love with her Harry, so of course a few tears were necessary. Harry turned off the main road and was now headed for the gate. The gate was wide open. Years ago it would have been closed.

"Gate's open?" Hermione asked.

"The Castle, and the Grounds are open to the public during the summer Hols," Harry said. "After all, it is famous and the new Zoo and Botanical Gardens are here..."

"Gardens?"

"Neville's doing. He still uses the old greenhouses for classes, but he has built the largest magical botanical gardens in the world. I only wish..."

"What Harry?"

"Well, I wish it wasn't the summer Hols in a way. Neville and Luna are off on Safari. Fair bet they come back with more plants and creatures for this place, but I really hoped they could be at our wedding."

Hermione could only nod in agreement. Years ago, they had been good friends and she did miss them.

"Oh well," Harry said as he turned the Kart off the path and down a hill towards...

"Hagird's hut?" Hermione asked.

"Yep," Harry replied. "He's probably at the Zoo on the other side of the forest. He's there all the time. Love's his beasties he does but..."

"Kids?"

"Yes Daddy," Luna piped up.

"You're Mummy tell you about our friend Hagrid?"

"Yep!" Little Harry replied. "Is he really ten feet tall?"

"'Bout that. Anyway this is his house."

"It's so small," Daphne said. "I mean if he's that big..."

"He likes it," Harry said. "Now, he's not home. He's at the Zoo and we'll see him later and maybe his brother too."

"Grawp?" Hermione asked.

"What's that?" Rose added.

"Hagrid's half-brother is named Grawp," Harry said.

"What kind of name is that?" Daphne asked.

"A giant's name."

"Giants?"

"Yep! Grawp is a giant. Twice as tall as Hagrid. He works at the zoo too. Fair few giants work there now."

"A fair few?" Hermione asked.

"Beyond the zoo is a village of them. About sixty families all told."

"Sixty? Harry! Are you kidding? You remember them! They're dangerous!"

"To quote Hagrid: they're misunderstood," Harry replied. "Their race had been oppressed for so long..."

"Harry?"

"Wizards made them what they were, Hermione. They were a peaceful if large sized race until we made them into dumb, violent brutes. We took their language, denied them access to knowledge and forced them off their lands. By nature, they are herdsmen. They tend to animals. Sheep and cattle mainly, but they were denied their rights by us and grew to resent us and all humans.

"I had a long talk with Grawp not long after the War, and yes he can talk quite well now. Oddly, he's probably easier to understand than Hagrid these days. I learned a lot about what his people were once like and why they became what they were. If you were denied the right to learn, how would you respond? Over generations, they came to hate us. But Grawp realized that there were some of us who might see things differently. I offered him land and he then went off in search of a wife and came back with a load of giants who just want to live as they once did. Every giant is taught about how we oppressed them, but here they have their pastures and a few like Grawp work at the Zoo with the more dangerous creatures.

"Believe me, while most non-magicals and such accept them easily, it's always amusing watching the Purebloods at the Zoo when they first encounter one of the caretakers," Harry chuckled. "Odd thing though..."

"What?" Hermione asked.

"Seems the children love the giants."

"Really? I would have thought..."

"That blood thirsty nonsense was fiction in many ways," Harry said. "A History of Magic, was the worst lie foisted upon us and Binns the poorest excuse of a professor."

"So he's not here any more?"

"Nope. Banished into the next adventure five years ago."

"And who teaches that course now?"

"Professor Diggle."

"Not ...?"

"The same. I am told the students love that course now."

"Pity," Hermione said.

"Why's that?"

"You always caught up on your sleep in History."

Harry could not help but laugh at that for it was most certainly true. Five minutes into the next lecture on Goblin Wars and he had always found himself asleep.

They were now driving up a hill on the far side of the Castle. As they crested a ridge, a huge, gleaming glass building Hermione had never seen before was before them and it seemed several people were either entering or leaving.

"What is that?" Hermione asked.

"Neville's Botanical Garden," Harry replied. "I think he copped the design of the old Crystal Palace in London. Houses over 3,000 different varieties of magical plants, 500 he discovered on his expeditions with Luna."

"My word!"

"Ah," Harry then said, "here we are."

Their vehicle pulled into what could only be described as a Kart park and Hermione saw it was not far from the main entrance to the Castle proper.

"This place is so amazing," Rose said. "Can we go inside?"

"That was my plan," Harry replied. "What do you think, Love?" he asked Hermione.

"I..."

"I was thinking we can show them our tower, the library, some of the classrooms, the Great Hall, Trophy Room... And I have to show them the Hospital Wing."

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"Aside from the fact that there's now a plaque above the bed I spent all that time in?"

"You're kidding!"

"And I do believe Madam Pomphrey is around."

"Oh," Hermione replied. She did want to see the Healer in a way, given her condition.

"This is after all where we became..."

"Sounds wonderful."

"Oh, and by the way, the Headmistress is expecting us."

"She is?"

"Her office first," Harry replied.

"Is it still?"

"Professor McGonagall, yes."

"Oh my!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2006 - HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

"This is so cool!" Little Harry said staring up at the Castle. "Way better than the others we saw!"

"Daddy?" Luna asked.

"Yes?"

"Why are the bricks different colors?"

Harry looked up and saw what she was talking about. The stones higher up on the walls of this part of the Castle were much lighter in color than the ones were lower on the wall.

"That's from the War," Harry said.

"Why?"

"Well, this is the Great Entrance Hall and it's walls were broken by spells and evil giants," Harry replied. "The lighter stones were the ones used to fix it up again."

"Different quarry?" Rose asked.

"Oh no. Same one they used about a thousand years ago," Harry said. "It was reopened to rebuild the Castle and is still open as the stones are used for the giants' village and any stonework in Hogsmeade. Anyway, we could have used magic to make them look the same as the lighter stones are much newer, but it was decided not to. It's left that way to remind everyone of the price of war, as if the Heroes Cemetery overlooking the lake is not enough."

"We stop by every time we are here," Teddy added. "That way I can visit with my parents."

"And the others," Harry added softly.

Hermione could not help it. She felt the pain in her chest and the tears in her eyes. She had friends buried there too. How could she

have forgotten that? Deep down she knew she had not. She just was not thinking about it right now. Not until Harry mentioned it did it come to the fore in her mind. Like her Daddy, so many buried so far from their homes.

"Shall we go in?" Harry suggested, although it was a rhetorical question as Harry climbed the broad and shallow steps that led to the great doors of the Castle which stood wide open. Harry entered the Great Entrance Hall and allowed a moment for his eyes to adjust to the relative dark. He could see the broad steps leading up about a half floor to a landing and the large, double doors that opened into the Great Hall flanked with the banners of the four houses, the Hogwarts crest and now, the banner for the Severus School. As with every time he entered, in his mind he yelled "I'm home." Hogwarts had been and would always be his first real home.

"Wow!" he heard the kids say behind him.

"This is so cool," he heard Teddy say. The truth was, while Teddy had been to Hogsmeade a couple of times, it was usually during the school term and as Harry had no children at the school, while they could visit the school grounds, the Castle was closed to visitors. Last summer was the first summer it was opened to visits and that had been a very busy summer at work for Harry. So this was Teddy's first time inside the Castle.

"You and Mommy met here?" Luna asked.

"Well, not right here." Harry said. "We first met on the train coming here our first time and we used to meet every day for meals in the Great Hall and in our Common Room in the evenings and stuff."

"Can we see those?" Daphne asked."

"Of course," Harry said. "Great Hall is through those doors there."

"Cool!" Teddy said. "Dad says it's wicked," he added as he raced up the stairs and opened one of the doors. "Cool!" he gasped disappearing inside. The other children were hard on Teddy's heels and Hermione and Rose followed behind. For some reason, Harry stood there with a smile on his face listening to the children as they explored the Great Hall. He was about to follow them when a woman's voice stopped him.

"Hello Harry Potter," it said softly.

Harry looked for the voice's owner and saw a petite blonde haired woman about his age with pale blue eyes. Harry was surprised to see her.

"Luna?"

"I see you're having a relatively Wrackspurt free morning, Harry Potter," Luna (Lovegood) Longbottom replied with a slight smile on her face. "You're not completely befuddled. But you do look ... confused, yes?"

"I - er - I thought you and Neville were going off on expedition."

"Oh we were and it would have quite lovely. But something came up so we came back."

"Something came up?" Harry asked wondering if the secret was so not secret that it could find Luna and Neville in the Congo.

"Oh yes," Luna said in her usually airy tone. "My breakfast mostly. Sometimes lunch or dinner. It was very annoying and I feared that I might be allergic to the Congolese nargles. But Madam Pomphrey says it's okay. Who were those people you were with? Was that Teddy I saw?"

Harry nodded. "And you should meet the others, Luna. I can't believe I forgot you were expecting."

Luna shrugged. "Given the recent events in your life Harry Potter, I think I can forgive you. So did you find a replacement for Neville as groomsman?"

Harry nodded. "Sorry."

"It's okay, Harry. We went off sort of last minute and came back the same way. We can still come?"

"Of course."

"Then that's all that matters. Is Hermione with you?"

Harry nodded. "Where's Neville?"

"Oh he's up with Minerva. I was going to meet him there, but there's no rush. So, can I meet your friends?"

Harry nodded and led her to the Great Hall. There was one change to the Great Hall that Harry was certain Hermione was going to ask about. Before when they were students, there had been four long tables, one for each of the four Houses. Now there were five. Hermione might also note that there were more seats at the head table for faculty since they attended all those years ago. Hermione was standing with her back to them as they entered and seemed to be explaining something to the others. Hermione turned around.

"Luna?" she asked when she saw who was with Harry.

"Yes, Mommy?" her daughter started. She stopped when she saw the two women hug.

"It's been so long," Hermione began wiping tears from her face.

"Good to see you too, Hermione," Luna said.

"I thought ..."

"You can imagine my surprise ..."

"Oh, it's good to see you." Hermione repeated.

"So, you finally got rid of the Wrakspurts and realized you and Harry were meant to be," Luna began.

"What?"

"Wrakspurts. They are mutli-dimensional creatures that interfere with things. Nasty little things, really. But all is now as it should have been, yes?"

Hermione could not help but chuckle.

"So, you and Harry are ..."

"You know?"

"Neville and I were there when he announced it to his trusted friends. We were supposed to be off on expedition but complications forced our return. We're so looking forward to it. Congratulations?"

"Thanks."

"And who are these lovelies? I know Teddy but..."

"This is my Mum, Rose," Hermione began. "Mum? This is Luna Lovegood."

"Longbottom," Luna corrected in a musical tone.

"Longbottom," Hermione repeated. "She's a dear, old friend."

"Nice to finally meet my granddaughter's namesake," Rose Granger said.

Luna looked confused.

"This is my younger sister Daphne," Hermione continued introducing her sister.

"She looks just like you," Luna said.

"Don't even think about saying I could be Sissy's daughter," Daphne said with a smile.

"She hates that," Hermione added.

"And these two?"

"These are our children," Hermione said glancing at Harry, "Harry and Luna."

"Mommy?" Little Luna asked. "Does she have the same name as me?"

"Yes Sweetie," Hermione replied.

"Why?"

"She's my friend. She's a very special person just as you are and she has a very special name, which is why I named you that."

"Oh. Okay."

"You did?" Luna asked.

Hermione nodded. She was not about to say that there was no way in hell she would name her daughter after any of her other friends from Hogwarts. Ginny had been her friend, but she had not stood by her when it mattered the most all those years ago. Lavender had been one too, and was one again, but back then? No. And she was not about to name her daughter Parvati. Luna had never hurt her and was such a gentle soul. It was "Luna" and nothing else.

"Thank you, Hermione," Luna said tearing up. "I really ... oh, bother."

"What's the matter?" Hermione asked.

"Well, you've been pregnant before. You know what it's like."

"Congratulations," Hermione said. Harry mentioned something like that. "And Neville? I guess I kind of saw that..."

"I didn't," Luna said. "Not for a long time."

"Oh?"

Luna sighed. "After leaving Hogwarts I went to work for a naturalist who I thought could teach me things and allow me to make discoveries and stuff. Rolf Scamander was his name, grandson of Newt by the same name. His granddad was a great naturalist and, of course, we did use his books at school. Rolf was marginal at best. He was older, corpulent and preferred to stay in his office rather than in the field and in his tent in the field to actually looking. I was one of five young witches on his payroll and I soon learned that the bushes he wanted to investigate did not have any leaves, if you catch my meaning."

"You didn't!"

Luna shook her head. "I was out looking. His other staff was ... well. Because I actually made some discoveries, he left me alone. Of course, I got no credit for that and was the lowest paid on staff because there was one creature I was not going to try and find."

"That's..."

Luna waived off the potential Hermione rant. "I quit after a year. Worked for Daddy for a year or so. I don't mind writing, but I really wanted to find new and interesting creatures. Anyway, this would have been about 2002 or so, I ran into Neville and he had just left the Auror's to start teaching at Hogwarts and we got to talking and decided to go on expedition to the Amazon over the summer and I'd return to Daddy's paper during the year while Neville taught. It was wonderful! We made so many discoveries together that summer, and not just his plants and my creatures! He's such a gentleman, but I soon learned there was only one snake I wanted in my lawn."

"Er," Hermione began, "too much..."

"Anyway, we continued to expedition together and he finally saw what I did and asked me after coming back from New Guinea to marry him, and by then there was no other answer other than yes and last December we did!

"I'd say it's a true match. We've discovered so much together and not just the plants that are now here at the Garden or the animals I've brought to the Zoo."

"You," Hermione began. It really was too much information.

"And last summer we finally found the Crumple Horned Snorkack. I can thank Neville for that 'cause there's no way Daddy would have found them."

"H-how?"

"They are shy and retiring creatures," Luna said. "They can become invisible to avoid predators and they usually see us as predators, hence the only fleeting glimpses. But Neville helped me find a way to attract them. It seems the sounds I make in the throws of passion are very similar to its mating call and ..."

"Okay, okay, I get the picture," Hermione laughed.

"We actually have an exhibit here at the Zoo," Luna continued. "That's where I work when I am not out in the field. Well, now that I'm with child, Madam Pomphrey says I should avoid field research for a while. That's okay though, because I've been meaning to write a book about my discoveries and never seemed to have the time.

"So, Hermione, what have you been up to all this time? I never believed any of that rubbish in the Daily Prophet, by the way. I'm sure it must have been exciting."

"I wouldn't call it exciting after my time here," Hermione said, "but interesting? Indeed it has been." And she began telling Luna about her life abroad.

While Hermione and Luna caught up, Harry was showing the others around the Great Hall and telling them stories of anything he could think of regarding what had happened to Hermione and him in this room. This Castle held so many memories for Harry and most centered around his best friend and now soon to be wife. He showed them the spot where they were sorted into their houses and told them how his sorting went. He explained that the Houses sat at assigned tables and where he and Hermione usually sat at meals. They almost always sat next to each other or across from each other and upon reflection Harry now realized it was Hermione's choice where she sat and if she wanted to talk, she always sat across from him, otherwise she sat next to him. Should have seen it even back then, Harry thought to himself.

He told them about the House Cup and how his House, Gryffindor, won it eight years running, six when he was there, one when his friend Neville Longbottom, Luna's husband, was the Head Boy in all but name and one more time when Hermione returned to school. Harry regretted that his House had not won it since but told the kids that the new house - Severus House had won it each of the last two years and as he had founded that House, he considered it a win.

"Harry?" Hermione finally asked having finished her talk with Luna, "you did say we were going to see Professor McGonagall."

"Oh, right," Harry chuckled. "Still, this has been fun."

"Come on Dear," Hermione said softly.

"Alright you lot," Harry called out. "More to see and do! Now, if you are nice, I'll show you where Hermione and me first became best friends and where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is."

"Harry?" Hermione began.

"Cool!" Teddy exclaimed. "That's totally wicked! Can we get in?"

"Fraid not, Ted," Harry said gravely. "You need to be able to talk to snakes to open it and I lost that ability at the end of the war."

"Oh man!" the boy huffed in disappointment.

"But at least you'll know where it is. And there's another reason I want to show you that."

"What other possible reason could there be," Hermione all but growled.

"You'll see," Harry replied with a wink.

The group followed Harry through some halls. Rose and the Grangers were amazed at the magical paintings they passed. Despite living in the American Magical World, they had never seen paintings like this before - ones that moved and even talked. They all knew about magical photographs, but those never talked. Harry explained that magical paintings did not become animated until the subject of the painting had passed away. He admitted he did not know how it worked, but the magic seemed to allow some essence of their former selves to animate the painting. They soon found themselves standing before a gargoyle.

"Stand aside," Harry said.

"Sir!" the gargoyle responded and moved off to the side revealing a round space beyond.

"How did you do that?" Hermione asked. "Surely that's not the password."

"I'm on the Board of Governors. One hold over from the past is I don't need no stinking password. Right then, Luna Longbottom first. We'll follow."

"Why?" Teddy asked.

"Cause Luna's husband is up there. Also, I never told Minerva we were coming and want that to be a surprise. Luna?"

Luna Longbottom stepped into the space and slowly began to rise as a spiral stair grew from the floor.

"That's so cool!" Little Harry said.

"Indeed it is," Harry agreed.

"I love magic," Rose Granger added. Harry chuckled. He could not remember the number of times he had said that over the years.

The stairs stopped moving and Harry led the group upwards. They reached the top and Harry turned to them. "I'm going in first and I want you all to wait here 'til I call for you."

"Why?" several voices asked.

"Minerva has yet to attend my picnic. Always claims she's too busy and those sort of things are not her style. She doesn't know I am here with all of you and just thinks that I am once again here to try and persuade her to come. And I know that alone I will fail but..."

"You're going to prank her," Teddy said.

Harry winked at his son.

"Harry!" Hermione scolded. "You..."

"I think if we all walked in at once, she might have a ... problem. Trust me?"

Hermione could only nod.

"This is so cool," Daphne whispered to Teddy.

"Yeah! Dad's one of the prank masters! I wanna be one too."

"Well that makes two of us."

"Really?"

"Please! Got to keep the young ones on their toes!"

"Top of your class and a Prank Mistress in training. You know Daph, if you can sit a broom too, we could be great friends."

"Never flew before - not like that anyway."

"I can teach you."

"You would?"

"Can't have a Prank Mistress who can't fly away when she needs to."

"When?" Daphne asked.

"At the Manor," Teddy replied. "We can't fly in London, but we'll be at the Manor for a while and I can teach you then. Want a lesson tomorrow?"

"Love one," Daphne replied. "Oooh! Harry's going in!"

Harry entered the office of the Headmistress. He saw Headmistress McGonagall seated behind her desk talking with Neville and Luna Longbottom. Behind her, the portrait of Albus Dumbledore snored quietly and at first he thought his entrance had not been noticed.

"Potter!" a voice called and he looked at the portrait of Severus Snape. The voice alerted the others that they had a visitor.

"Good day to you Severus," Harry said.

"Always the arrogant one!" the portrait shot back.

"Always the rude one," Harry replied. The portrait smiled at him.

"Harry?" McGonagall asked, "what brings you here?"

"As if you have to ask," the portrait of Severus said. "Once again, he is here to convince you to attend his pathetic picnic. Am I not correct Potter?"

"Aside from the pathetic part, you are Severus."

"I am entitled to my opinion."

"And I am entitled to ignore it."

"As always."

"Harry," McGonagall began, "you know what I think of such frivolities."

"So," Harry replied, "an appeal to the need to socialize amongst the good people of this land will fail once again."

"We have a year to prepare for and the Orientation..."

"Which Dudley assures me is all set."

"Still, just because you're on the Board of Governors does not mean I am required to attend."

"And I have never implied otherwise, Minerva," Harry said.

"No. You haven't. But as I have made my intentions in this regard known, despite your requests and arguments, surely..."

"I shall not stop trying until you finally come."

"And you think you have a compelling argument this year?"

"Indeed I do, Minerva."

"I doubt it."

"If you will not attend my picnic this Saturday, how about my wedding this Saturday?"

"Wedding? You're getting married?" McGonagall seemed stunned. "Is it this Janie hussy the papers are on about? I mean, how could you!"

"She lived under that name," Harry said somewhat angered by his friend's reaction, "but she's no 'hussy', Minerva. She is a highly educated and accomplished witch and I am proud to be lucky enough to become her husband!"

Neville and Luna were doing their best not to break out laughing.

"And I would hope," Harry continued, "that when you meet her, you would see her for the wonderful woman she is. I would hope you would offer us your blessing and honor us with your presence at our wedding this Saturday."

"I would, of course, have to meet this woman," McGonagall replied. "I really don't want to seem critical, Harry. But after your last disaster of a marriage ... You are and were one of two students whom I looked upon as family and I cannot sit by and say nothing if my surrogate son is about to make a mistake."

Harry smirked. "Who was the other student?"

"You know as well as I do it was Hermione Granger..."

Outside Hermione gasped at this revelation.

"... but she is gone from us. Most likely she's dead or living as a Muggle. I so wish it were not true. But nothing says that it is not."

"Would you like to meet my fiancé?" Harry asked.

"Indeed I would."

"She's just outside," Harry said. "You all can come in now."

Minerva McGonagall had been a teacher now for over fifty years. Naturally for her, when the children entered, her eyes fell to them first. She knew Teddy Lupin but the young girl next to him was a shock. She looked to be about the same age as Teddy, but sweet Merlin if she was not the spitting image of Hermione Granger. The two others were obviously younger. One looked like Teddy did when

he morphed into his "I'm my Dad's Son" form. The other was blonde, yet something told Minerva the two younger children were brother and sister and most likely twins. She then looked at the adults who had entered and her eyes fixed upon the younger of the two women. She recognized the younger one immediately and tears of joy began to fill her eyes. She rose from her desk and on unsteady legs walked over until she stood before the younger woman.

"H-Hermione?" she asked. She could see there were tears in the younger woman's eyes as well and hoped it was the girl she saw as her surrogate daughter and prayed that it was true that Harry was finally marrying the only girl he should have.

The young woman nodded. "It's so good to see you again, Professor," she said with a voice filled with emotion.

"Oh my dear girl," McGonagall said losing her normal decorum in the process as she rushed forward and to Hermione's surprise, drew the younger witch into a tight hug. "Thank Merlin you're okay," McGonagall added. "I was so afraid something terrible had happened and ..."

McGonagall pulled back.

"You?" she asked. "You and Harry are getting..."

"Married," Hermione finished. "This Saturday at his picnic."

"Oh my! I mean ... rather sudden? Or perhaps not. Oh my!"

"It's a long story, professor," Hermione began.

"Is there a short version, Miss Granger?" McGonagall said in her professor tone but with a smirk on her face.

"When I left to find my parents," Hermione began, "I was in love with Harry and he was in love with me but we never told each other and since my mother did not want to come back, I had no reason to. We moved to America and I went to university, got my degrees and a really good job. About a month ago, Harry and I ran into each other in New York and talked and it all came out and we never stopped loving each other and here we are."

"I'm sure there's more to your story than that, Hermione," McGonagall said, "and as you have not been my student in quite a while, please call me Minerva."

"Thank you Professor ... sorry, Minerva."

"And are you and Harry really getting married this Saturday?"

Hermione nodded and then blushed. "We love each other and our children deserve to have both of their parents."

"Children? You mean to say these three? I know Teddy is not yours. Known the little trouble maker his whole life, but these three?"

"Hey!" Daphne protested. "I am NOT Sissy's daughter. Why does everyone think that?"

"Cause you look like her," Teddy said. "Not that there's anything wrong with that, Daph, but it's true. And you're real smart too, just like Dad said she is and ... well you're also different but in a good way, I think."

"How so?" Daphne asked.

"You're really cool. We were born the exact same time on the exact same day even though you were born in Australia and I was born in London and you like pranks."

"And that makes me different?"

"Dad always said your big Sis never liked pranks."

"Oh."

"Already corrupting my sister?" Hermione teased.

"Her first, then my brother and sister," Teddy snarked back.

"What have I done to deserve this?"

"Come on Sissy," Daphne implored, "Teddy's my first friend over here and I think we can be great friends, isn't that right Ted?"

"You will come fly with me tomorrow?"

"Course!"

"Great friends it is!"

"Kids!" Rose interjected.

"Sorry," Daphne said.

"Minerva," Hermione began, "This is my younger sister Daphne."

"Oh my!" McGonagall replied. "I'm sorry but I can see how Daphne can be confused for your daughter."

"Hey!" Little Luna said. "I'm my Mommy's daughter!"

"You are?" McGonagall said almost in shock.

"I am! And this jerk here is my twin brother Harry."

"Hey!" Little Harry protested.

"These two are yours?" McGonagall asked Hermione.

Hermione nodded. "My Luna and Harry," she said. "Harry is named after their Daddy."

McGonagall looked at Harry and he nodded. "Oh my," she said. "Why didn't you ever tell me, Harry?"

"Until I met Hermione and my kids in New York just last month, I didn't know," Harry said. "Long story. Bottom line is that ever since she left, Hermione was trying to write to me and in her letters told me everything, but I had a certain, red-headed housemate who saw to it I never received any of her letters."

"I'm sorry Harry," McGonagall said.

Harry shrugged. "Better late than never, right? And now, we are finally getting married."

"And why have I not heard of this before now?"

"We're keeping it as quiet as possible at least until the moment Hermione here walks down the aisle. You can imagine what it would be like if this were common knowledge, can't you?"

McGonagall nodded.

"Most of the guests at the picnic will not know before it happens. So, are you coming?"

"Oh my! You two do know I would not miss this for the world. Although I will always suspect you two are only doing this to try and get me to that picnic," McGonagall added as a joke.

"His ribs are worth it all by themselves," Neville said.

"I take it you two knew of this?" McGonagall asked Neville and Luna.

"We are Charter Members of the Get Harry Hitched Society," Luna said.

"The what?"

"Group of friends on both sides of the Pond who have worked hard to make this happen," Harry said. "Rose Granger is President of the American Chapter."

"Really?"

"My own Mum kept this secret from me," Hermione said in mock indignation. "I knew he was going to propose and we were going to get married when I arrived here last Saturday, but we had not discussed a date yet. I was hoping it would be sooner rather than later, after all we did plan just about everything before we left the States, but I didn't think it would be so soon."

"Is there are reason you wanted it sooner," McGonagall asked.

"I'd rather not walk down the aisle with a big baby belly."

"Mommy and Daddy are having a baby," Little Luna said.

"Oh my goodness!" Minerva said. Luna gasped as well.

"When are you due?" Luna asked.

"March, most likely," Hermione said. "Don't know for certain yet. I only found out last week. One of the things I'm hoping to do today is see Madam Pomphrey."

"I - I am sure that won't be a problem," McGonagall said. "I suppose congratulations are in order?"

"Yes, thank you," Hermione replied.

"You're not ... not because of the children - the child?"

"Nope," Harry said. "I asked her before she told me she was expecting. That's just an extra bonus. As for Harry and Luna, I am marrying their mother because I have always loved her. I would have married her back then had I known she felt the same way and had I told her how I felt, but..."

"So what are the plans?" McGonagall asked and Harry described them in detail. Minerva was invited to the Manor Friday for the rehearsal and would have a room for two nights, as the picnic / reception was supposed to get over rather late. She accepted her invite and then decided to join Harry and the others on the tour of the Castle and offered that when it ended, they could have lunch in the Great Hall with what faculty was present, an offer that got the children excited.

The tour included several things that did not surprise Minerva. Harry showed them the Potions, Transfiguration and Defense class rooms as they played a large roll in Hermione's "Daddy Stories." Of course they had to see the library, Gryffindor Tower, Harry and Hermione's favorite couch by the fire in the Common Room and their dorm rooms and beds. Harry told them where he slept and where each and everyone of his classmates slept and described what the room looked like with Ron's Chudley Cannon Posters, Dean's West Ham Posters and other things. For the first time, Harry actually got to see Hermione's dorm and it was definitely far more feminine than the boys dorms.

As they made their way from the tower to the Hospital Wing - the last stop on the tour, Harry led them on a surprising detour to two different girl's bathrooms.

"Harry?" Hermione asked as they entered the first one.

"Why show us a bathroom?" Rose asked.

"Because this is not your ordinary bathroom," Harry said. "It is home to a friend of ours, a ghost by the name of Myrtle."

As if on cue, the ghost of a long death thirteen year old girl appeared.

"Hello Harry," the ghost said. "My you look older."

"I'm almost twenty-six," Harry said.

"Well that explains it then. I regret we ghosts have little notion of time. And hello Headmistress."

"Myrtle." McGonagall replied.

"Why would you want us to see this?" Rose asked again.

"Oh, that's easy," Myrtle said. "When Harry was much younger he and his friends Ron and Hermione used to keep me company while they were brewing Polyjuice Potion in secret. Another girl was using this bathroom too, but she was not very nice and used it to open the Chamber of Secrets to let that foul monster hurt students, just like when I was in school."

"Who?" Teddy asked.

"The wicked witch," Harry replied.

"Figures."

"And," Myrtle continued, "at the end of the year, Harry and his friend Ron open the Chamber as well and Harry killed the beast down there."

"Can we see it?" Little Harry asked.

"Fraid not," Harry replied. "When I fought and defeated the Dark Wizard in the War, I lost the ability to open the Chamber."

"How?"

"I used to be able to talk to snakes. I can't anymore and unless you can, you cannot open the Chamber."

"Oh."

After introducing Myrtle properly to the whole family, they left and went to the second girl's bathroom.

"Another bathroom?" Little Harry moaned.

"Not just any bathroom," Hermione said. "This is where Harry fought the Troll that was trying to kill me. You remember that story."

"It was real?"

"All too real," Hermione said.

"Two eleven year olds with only two months of magical training took on and knocked out a ten foot tall Mountain Troll," McGonagall said almost in awe. "I have never seen the like before or since."

"I still cannot believe we only got five points for it," Harry chuckled.

"Well," McGonagall said primly, "you were out of bounds and had defied the Headmaster's orders to return to your dormitories."

"There was that," Harry agreed as he led the tour out.

"And I was pretty sure Hermione lied about why she was in this bathroom, but did not want to press the issue."

Hermione blushed.

"What really happened, Mommy?" Little Luna asked.

"A boy said some mean things about me and I was in here crying and wanting to go home when the troll came in," Hermione said.

"Then in came my Knight In Shining Armor - you Daddy - and saved my life."

"Did you fall in love right then?"

"No, but I began to."

"It was not as heroic as your mother makes it sound," Harry said. "My friend Ron and I - you met him in New York - came looking for Hermione. Well, I did and Ron followed and it was about to kill her so there I was, barely five foot tall, scrawny and not knowing much magic at all, so I jumped on the Troll's back and jammed my wand up its nose. The Troll really did not take kindly to that and I thought I was a goner. Ron cast a spell we had just been taught that day and the Troll knocked itself out."

Minerva chuckled. "You never told me what really happened. Had I known that, I would have given you fifteen points for sheer dumb luck. Very brave, but very foolish."

Harry shrugged. "I wasn't going to let her die. She was and is a friend."

Harry then led them to the last stop before the Hospital Wing - the Trophy Room. This stop would be bittersweet for Harry. He showed his guests the House Cups Gryffindor had earned while he was a student, his awards for special services to the school, and then the Quidditch plaques, Cup and team photos.

"We finally won the Cup in '94, my Third Year," Harry said. "Oliver Wood was our Captain. Our Chasers were Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson. Beaters were the twins, Fred and George Weasley. Alicia and Fred died in the War." He went through every quidditch team for every house during his six years, named the players and their fates. Almost a third of them died during the war. "They never had a chance to live their lives," Harry said. "They died before they could have a family of their own. War is a terrible thing. These young people never got to grow up because of War. Many had their entire families wiped out."

"That's so wrong," Daphne said.

"It is," Harry agreed. "Ever since the end, many of us who survive on both sides have worked hard to see to it that it will never happen again."

Their last stop on the tour before lunch was the Hospital Wing. Hermione met with Madam Pomphrey in private. She had helped many a former student through pregnancy and delivery when they became mothers and Hermione could really think of no one else for her. She also wanted to pick the Senior Healer's brain about Eros Syndrome. While she was off with her Healer, Harry showed the others the bed he spent countless days in recovering from all sorts of injuries. Above it was a plaque, courtesy of George Weasley which read: "THE HARRY JAMES POTTER MEMORIAL COT: RESERVED FOR USE BY THOSE STUDENTS WHO CANNOT HELP BUT SPEND MONTHS IN THIS PLACE." Harry explained that it was calculated he had spent a total of six months on that cot, edging out the second most frequent visitor - Hermione - by a little over a month all told. While waiting for Hermione, Harry told seemingly endless tales of every time he found himself in that cot.

Lunch in the Great Hall was a small affair. Aside from Harry, Teddy and the Grangers, there were Professor McGonagall, Neville and Luna Longbottom and Professor Flitwick, whom Hermione learned was now Deputy Headmaster. The rest of the faculty was either down in Hogsmeade for lunch, off on school business or on holiday. Still, the children were thrilled with the experience. After hearing stories for years, here they were eating where Harry and Hermione had spent so many years together with people they had been told about and looked at with reverence from the stories. It made everything seem so real and each in their own way felt pride at being a part of this wonderful family. Rose too was enjoying her experience and only wished her Robert was here with her. But as she ate, she felt he was in spirit.

There was one last stop on Harry's Hogwarts tour before they headed to the Zoo for the afternoon. It was the Heroes Cemetery where those who fell defending the school lay buried. Every year since Teddy became his Son, Harry brought Teddy here to be with his real parents for a time. He told Teddy that his real parents would want to know that he was well and how he was doing and every year, Teddy spent several minutes talking to the two stone markers that were above his parent's final resting place. The others stood at a

discreet distance, but could read what was carved on the headstones.

REMUS JOHN LUPIN

Born: 17 December 1959

Killed In Action At the Battle of Hogwarts

11 May 1998

Devoted Husband, Father and Friend.

NYMPHADORA TONKS LUPIN

Born: 7 June 1973

Killed In Action At the Battle of Hogwarts

11 May 1998

Loving Wife, Mother and Friend.

As Teddy spoke with his parents and told them about all the wonderful changes that had happened recently, an older couple was standing by another grave not far away. Harry and the others could hear a little of what they were saying.

"Son," the man said, "things have changed and I hope for the better. We can come and visit you now, your Mum and me. We swore that if we could, we would sing you your favorite song."

The woman then began singing in a true voice, her melody carrying across the field and into the valley and her pain evident as she sang her words:

"Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling,
From glen to glen, and down the mountain side,
The summer's gone, and all the flowers dying,
'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow,
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow.
'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow,
Oh Danny Boy, oh Danny boy, I love you so.

The man picked up from there and in a clear yet emotional tenor continued:

And if you come, when all the flowers dying,
And I am dead, as dead I well may be,

You'll come and find the place where I am lying,
And kneel and say an 'Ave' there for me.

And I shall hear, though soft you tread above me,
And all my dreams will warm and sweeter be,
If you'll not fail to tell me that you love me,
I'll sleep in peace until you come to me."

The couple then laid a wreath at the grave.

"We will come back, Son," the man said. "Now that we can find you,
we will come back."

The couple left. Out of curiosity, Harry walked over to the grave with Hermione and the others by his side, Teddy having placed his wreathes to his parents only moments before. Harry and the others stood and saw the name on the marker and for some reason, both Harry and Hermione began crying.

COLIN RYAN CREEVEY

Born: 11 May 1981

Killed In Action At The Battle of Hogwarts

11 May 1998

Beloved Son and Brother

"Who was he, Mommy?" Little Luna asked.

"A friend," Hermione said through her tears. "A friend who was too young to die."

War is indeed a terrible thing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2006 - HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY, SCOTLAND, U.K.

The Kart followed the gravel road from Hogwarts Castle into the Forbidden Forest. The road was the most direct route to the Zoo and after the Cemetery, Harry was not in the mood for a more scenic drive. It did not take them long to pass through the woods to the open moors on the far side. Almost upon leaving the woods, they could see the towering wooden palisade behind which, Harry explained, was the Zoo. They eventually arrive at a large Kart Park that was in front of a towering stone gatehouse. There were several Karts parked in rows and a large bus was disgorging families for their own day at the Zoo. Harry parked his Kart and led his family to the gates.

The first thing that struck both Rose and Hermione was that the Zoo was free. There was no admissions charge. It also reminded them of - well - a real Zoo, except the animals on exhibit would not be found at any Zoo they had ever seen.

Practically the first exhibit caught the attention of the children. It was Unicorns. The exhibit was wooded so as to mimic their forest home, but was open enough that the people could see the magnificent white animals with their spiraled, single horns as well as the golden colored foals. The sign indicated these were unicorns from the Forbidden Forest that had been driven out by the Acromantula infestation. While the giant spiders were not a threat to the adults, they were killing off all the foals, hence much of the herd was relocated here for safety.

What surprised Hermione was how friendly the animals were, at least to her, her Mum and children. She recalled from years ago that these were generally shy and retiring creatures and for some reason the adults did not like men. Women and children, however, were more than tolerated and being able to pet one was the highlight of Little Luna's day.

There were clearly more exhibits than there would be time to see everything. Harry had specific exhibits he wanted the children to see and following the Unicorns, they soon found themselves at the Hippogryff paddock. There were three Hippogryffs in the enclosure

and the sign said they were free to come and go as they pleased. Harry told the kids about Buckbeak and how Hermione had ridden him once upon a time as they watched a fourth of the bizarre half bird of prey half horse fly in from the forest. The sign explained that the creatures hunted in the forest and would eat just about anything that they could devour in a single gulp including rats, ferrets, bats and smaller Acromantulas. It was not unheard of for one of them to kill a larger one of the giant spiders, which usually could be determined if all the others suddenly flew off. Apparently, these Hippogryfs had developed a taste for spiders.

Several exhibits later and they were at the Thestral enclosure. This was another species rescued from the forest as the nasty spiders ate their young as well. What surprised Harry was that only Little Harry and Luna could not see the black, winged horse like creatures. Of course, the two little ones were upset, until they found that they could still pat the creatures even if they could not see them.

"Teddy?" Hermione asked Harry.

"We were with his Gran when she passed away," Harry said. "He might not remember it, but he did see it. Daphne?"

"Mum and Daph were with Dad when he died," Hermione said. "I guess it's the same. What I don't understand is why you could not see them before the end of Fourth Year? I mean you were there when your Mum died."

"And I killed Quirrel when I was eleven," Harry agreed. "But I know I did not see him die. I passed out before he bought it. As for Mum, I don't think I actually saw her die either. I think I might have closed my eyes just before it happened."

"Oh. I guess that makes sense."

The kids were thoroughly enjoying the Zoo and all the magical creatures. They saw a Manticore, Cockatrice and a Gryffin. All were behind very protective wards and specially made magical glass that prevented them from attacking the guests.

When they finally reached the Cuple Horned Snorkacks, Harry could not help but laugh.

"What's so funny?" Hermione asked.

"I've seen these before," Harry said. "Well, not live ones, but there was a stuffed one over the bar at a friend's house in Atlanta, although he did not call it a Snorkack."

"And?" Hermione asked.

"In America, it's called a 'Jackalope.' Apparently, there's a place in Wyoming that sells them. I just thought it was a joke, you know?"

"No, I don't."

"A stuffed jackrabbit with antlers?"

"Oh." Hermione could see his point, for that's what these creatures looked like. Although the sign said that while it was probably related to the North American Jackalope, Snorkacks were native to Scandinavia. Sure enough, the next enclosure did indeed feature the smaller North American Jackalope.

As they walked around the huge Zoo, Hermione was surprised to some extent at the lack of any interest in them by the other visitors. She was not so surprised that she was not a focal point. Someone had made the point that she had not been seen in years and none of the stock photos the press used these days looked like her. Still, Harry was famous and well recognized. Yet the people did not pester him.

"I grew boring," Harry admitted when asked. "I'm not the romantic, tragic hero I was years ago. There are still some fan girl types out there, but they are far fewer and such. I have more to fear from Mrs. Malfoy in that regard than most others. Besides, this is a Zoo. Loads more things of interest here than me."

They stopped at one of the many shopping areas in the Zoo for ice cream and cold drinks, followed by buying some souvenirs for the children before heading to the most popular exhibits in the whole place. They soon passed under an archway where the next exhibits were proudly proclaimed: "HERE THERE BE DRAGONS!"

No sooner than they passed through the Arch and someone noticed them. He was hard not to notice and the children immediately said

something as the man in the Khaki uniform of the Zoo staff approached from a distance.

"Is that a giant?" Little Harry asked.

"Yep," Teddy said. "That's Grawp. He's really cool!"

"Allo, 'Arry," Grawp said when he reached them and the children strained to see his face. He towered over them all at nearly twenty feet in height. He was short for a giant, but huge for a human. "See yer bring friends?"

"Hello Grawp," Teddy said.

"Oi! Wee Teddy! Yer durn got bigger a bit."

"Not so big as Algie," Teddy said. "Is he around?"

"Nope. 'ome wif 'is Mum today."

"Algie's Grawp's son," Teddy explained. "He's two years younger than me and already over seven feet tall."

"E'll be a biggun," Grawp smiled. "'Is Mum's side, I guess. Oh my! Hermy?" the giant added looking at Hermione. She could only nod.

"Been long time, Hermy. Come ter see me dragons, 'ave you?"

Hermione nodded. She was still stunned that Grawp remembered her.

"Well, yer missed the feedin'. Still, if yer wanna, I could give yer the tour."

"Are you really a giant?" Little Harry asked. Grawp kneeled down, although he still towered over them and smiled at the boy.

"Aye lad, really am," Grawp replied. "Few of us work 'ere wrangling the nastier of beasties. Immune, see?"

"Wow!"

The giant chuckled and tossed something like a cookie into his mouth. "Alright then. And for your information, that was a magical cookie that helps me talk better. If you'll all gather round, we'll see the dragons!"

Hermione noticed a small crowd had gathered around them.

"My name is Grawp, and I am the head Dragon Keeper here at the Zoo. If you'll follow me? I will walk slowly so you all should be able to keep up."

Grawp then launched into his talk as he led the small crowd to the first glass wall enclosure. He explained to his audience that the Zoo in many ways owed its very existence to a dragon and it was the dragon in the enclosure. Harry and the others looked in and saw a huge, bright red dragon. It was a Hibernian Red Scale, also known as the Sea Dragon. Long ago it had been very common and nested in numerous colonies in Ireland and Wales near the Irish Sea. For those who were of non-magical backgrounds, Grawp told them that it was this breed of dragon that was prominently featured on the Welsh flag and not, as some wizards have suggested, the Common Welsh Green. The Red Scale was the largest dragon native to the British Isles and had been prized for potioners, wandmakers and armorers for centuries. Too prized, it seemed as the breed was thought to have been hunted to extinction over 150 years ago.

This particular dragon had been raised from an egg and had lived its entire life guarding the high security vaults at Gringotts. Eight years ago, a group of teenagers on a quest ... a point that got a knowing chuckle from many in the crowd and cause Harry and Hermione to look at each other in shock ... were nearly captured by Death Eaters and used that very Dragon to make their escape. It had settled in the Valley, but as it was then nearly blind and pale from close to two hundred years living deep beneath London and as it never had hunted its natural prey in its life, it nearly died. Hagrid, the Head Curator of the Zoo nursed it back from the brink, although it took him three weeks to find out what the Dragon ate. As it was almost white at that time, no one had a clear idea what breed it truly was as the three native species were almost identical in outward appearance and could only really be distinguished by their average size and coloration. The Red Scale, it seemed, was one of the few breeds of dragon known that hunted at sea.

The next two enclosures held two dragons each. In the first was a pair of Common Welsh Greens, a male and a female and it was clear the female was attending to a clutch of several eggs. Grawp explained that the Zoo had a dispensation from both the Ministry and the ICW to breed dragons - at least those native to Britain. In addition to the Greens, there were also two breeding pairs of Hebredian Blacks. Some of the young dragons would be returned to a reserve once they had fledged. Their hope was to ensure a long term and sustainable population.

A breeding pair of dragons raised one clutch every one to two years. Anywhere from ten to sixteen eggs would be in a single clutch. In the wild, if the pair were lucky, one of the baby dragons would live until it reached magical maturity. Prior to then, the young were very vulnerable. They were protected by their parents until they fledged at about one year of age. They reached magical maturity around seven. In between, they were prey. Magical and non magical predators alike killed most all dragon young during this time. Upon reaching magical maturity, a young dragon need only fear two things: other dragons and wizards; for it was upon reaching such maturity that they became desirable for their magic. And since even a juvenile dragon is very dangerous when threatened, the price of dragon stuff was high, as were the corresponding profits to the hunters.

The young dragons sent to the reserves were safe from hunting, provided they did not stray off, and it was hoped they would build up a healthy population as both breeds were in danger of dying out altogether. However, although the young would arrive when they were magically mature, not all would be sent there. As most all of the young raised at the Zoo would reach such maturity, there just was not enough reserve for all of them. Many would be sent to a farm run by the Zoo. That farm would eventually harvest them, at extremely low cost and hopefully put the hunters out of business.

After the dragons it was time to head back to Hogsmeade. Harry had promised a stop at the toy store and was not about to break it. On the way to the entrance, however, he was more than willing to let them check out the gift shop. Daphne and Luna both asked for their own plush unicorn. While all the kids found the dragons fascinating, the girls loved the unicorn exhibit. Teddy and Little Harry asked for animated dragon models. Little Harry asked for the Red Scale, as that was the one his Mum and Dad rode once. Although he said

nothing at the exhibit, he knew it was the same dragon from the stories his Mum had him. Teddy asked for a Hungarian Horntail as the store had models of dragons that were not (yet) part of the Zoo and that was the dragon his Dad had faced all alone years ago.

Harry was a little disappointed they did not run into Hagrid during their afternoon at the Zoo. He knew Hagrid would have loved to meet Hermione and their family. On the other hand, Hagrid would most certainly have made a scene of the reunion and the relative lack of recognition they had enjoyed that day would have been ruined. Besides, Hagrid was going to be at the Manor on Friday. He always came early to help Harry set things up - and stayed late.

As well as the day had gone, in both Hermione's and Rose's opinion, Harry had shown at the toy store. He told each child they could pick three toys and that was it. He had not backed down from that and helped each and every child decide as none of them could limit it to three on their own. True, Hermione thought, he had raised Teddy and therefore knew a bit about children, but it was not the same as her and her Mum, or so she thought. Harry proved a natural. Hermione watched in near awe as he helped each child pick their toys. She was sure given the long day that there would be a melt down, yet with Harry there was nothing more than a handful of pouts.

'How did I ever get so lucky,' Hermione thought to herself.

32 HIGH STEET HOGSMEADE

To say that Petunia Dursley was nervous was an understatement. She was straitening up the front parlor of her son's home for what had to be the tenth time that day. She had already cooked the diner as she had been too nervous to wait and she had really gotten used to the Weasley Stasis Food Box, a magical device even a non-magical could use. It looked like a refrigerator, but what it did was preserve any food in the same state as when it first was placed in the box. That meant that frozen food remained frozen and hot food strait from the cook top or oven remained hot. It could stay there for days and when finally served it would be just as if it had just been cooked.

Her nephew Harry was coming to dinner. There was a time when that would have made her nervous, but now it was rather routine. But, Harry was bringing with him his bride to be, her sister, his

mother-in-law to be and his own children. Petunia had been surprised at this development - Harry had children - but as he seemed very happy with that, she decided to be happy for him rather than critical. In fact, she had practically stopped being critical of her nephew the day she found out her own son was a wizard. While she never became maternal with regards to Harry, she would say their relationship had improved and was more or less familial now. And that was what she was worried about.

She knew enough about Harry's intended to know that the young woman probably knew something about how she and Vernon had treated Harry as a child. She was not and never had been proud of that time in her life. Marrying Vernon was one of many huge mistakes she had made - and all of them because she was too weak or scared to do what she knew was right. Still, she was worried that this Hermione woman would hate her and that would lead to another break with Harry. She did not want to go back to the way things had once been.

Fortunately, she was not alone in the house. Jena was there too. But Jena was out back watching the kids play and tending to the two youngest: Samantha and Rachel. Dudley might get home before Harry arrived, but Petunia could not count on that. It would be her job to welcome the new Potter family to her family home.

The door bell rang causing Petunia to jump. She did her best to calm herself before she went to the door and opened it. Standing before her were three adults and four children. She almost sighed seeing that Teddy and Harry were at the front of this group.

"Harry!" Petunia said with a genuine smile and gave him an affectionate hug, doing her best to show the others she was not what she might once have been.

"Where are the others?" Teddy asked, meaning the Dursley children.

"They're out back with Jena," Petunia replied.

"Great! Come on guys," Teddy began.

"Teddy?" Harry said. "Wait until they are all introduced."

"Okay," Teddy said softly.

"Guess I'll introduce the kids first," Harry chuckled. "They seem eager to get out and play."

"Good idea," Petunia said with a smile.

"Everybody, this is my Aunt Petunia Dursley. Aunt Petunia? Aside from Teddy here whom you already know, this is my soon to be Sister-in law Daphne Granger."

"Pleased to meet you," Daphne said offering Petunia her hand.

"Did you know we were both born at the exact same time and on the exact same day?" Teddy said. "Except she was born in Australia and I was born in London."

"Really?" Aunt Petunia asked looking at Harry who nodded in confirmation

"Yep!" Teddy said. "It's really kinda cool."

"And these two are our children Harry and Luna," Harry continued. "They're six."

"You left out that bit or I forgot," Petunia chuckled. "Two sets of six year old twins in the house and both boy's named Harry?"

"Can we go now Dad?" Teddy asked.

"Sure." Harry relied. And as soon as he said that, four pairs of feet began running to the back door. "No running in the house!" Harry called after them and they slowed down.

"It's okay, Harry," Petunia said.

"It's one of yours and Jena's rules and with ten kids here now, eight of whom are capable of self propulsion..."

"Nine," Petunia corrected. "Little Samantha might not be running yet, but she began walking a couple of weeks ago."

"Poor Jena," Harry laughed as the door to the back yard closed. "Right then. Aunt Petunia, I would like you to meet my soon to be Mother-in-law Rose Granger. Daphne is her younger daughter."

"Pleased to meet you." Rose said.

"And last but not least," Harry continued, "my fiancé Hermione."

"The lucky young woman herself," Petunia said with a smile, hugging the stunned witch. "Please come in? Dudley should be home soon and I'm holding dinner until then if that's okay. How about taking a seat in the parlor? Would anyone like some tea?"

"Yes please," Rose said and the others nodded. Hermione gave Harry a questioning look as if to say this was not the Aunt Petunia she expected.

Petunia soon returned with a tea service and began pouring. There were lemons, cream and sugar available depending upon ones taste. Once everyone had their cup, Petunia turned to Rose first. Rose had not been as cold to her as Hermione had been.

"Harry has told me you are a Dentist?" Petunia asked.

"I was. As we are moving back to London, I really don't want to start up yet another practice. I'll be working with Harry's Foundation."

"Really? Technically I work for it as well. Mostly it's here at the local primary school, but I occasionally get called in as a counselor's assistant for certain parents of first generation magicals."

"What sort of parents?" Rose asked.

"Abusive ones," Petunia said. "My ex-husband was an abusive man. Must have run in the family given his sister. The two of them spoiled my son rotten, treated me like dirt and Harry even worse. The sister knew nothing about magic, but Vernon did and...well that probably made things worse.

"And I didn't help much. I made that bed and considered it God's will for the mistakes I had made to that point. Terrible, I know, but I did not see any other way.

"Harry's Mum was my younger sister and my best friend in the whole world for a long time. We both knew she was a witch long before she got her Hogwarts letter and that scared me. I was not scared of her, I was scared for her. I was certain that if anyone found out, someone would come around and take her away and I'd never see or talk to my best friend ever again. I was consumed with the fear of losing her.

"Then she got her Hogwarts letter and I could not go there and be with her. Goodness knows, I tried. Still, I wrote her at least once a week and she wrote me back and as hard as it was her not being around, things between us were okay for a while. But as the years passed, it seemed I was losing her. And it was not just me. Our parents felt the same way and we were certain that she would choose her world over ours and her people over us and that would be the end of it and it killed me inside. I used to be pretty good at school and did real well on my O Levels, well enough to take college prep. But I lost interest in my studies and never sat for my A Levels. I blamed Lily for that. She was indeed a reason, but it was not her fault. Losing her killed me. Then I had a huge row with her the summer before her Fifth Year and said some very cruel things that I didn't really mean but was too stubborn to take back and..."

"And for the first time since I knew about it, I hated magic. It took my sister away from me forever, so I hated it because it was so cruel. I wound up working as a waitress. Vernon was a regular and a prat, but he had money it seemed and I was lonely and ... Well, what started out as a fling ended with me getting pregnant with Dudley. Vernon was not about to have a child out of wedlock as it would look bad, so he married me and we told everyone that Dudley was two months premature - a lie. It was obvious to me from the beginning that Vernon felt I trapped him. I didn't mean to really. I was young, single, pregnant and terrified and I had pretty much abandoned my own family by then over Lily. So I married a man I did not love who I knew to be a bully...

"It was as bad as I feared and got worse the day Harry was left with us. I never told Vernon about magic and never would have. But Dumbledore left a long letter with little Harry that I would never have let Vernon read because it was about magic and why Harry had to live with me. Me - not Vernon. I was Harry's sole guardian. I alone had access to Harry's trust. Vernon wanted me to abandon the boy - he even suggested a dustbin - and empty the boy's trust. He

considered magic an abomination and killing the boy was the just thing to do. I managed, for once, to stand up to him. I told him if Harry goes, I go and then the people who killed Harry's parents would kill him. I also lied and said I could not access Harry's trust because only a witch or wizard could. He relented, but not before beating me senseless.

"It was not the last time I stood up for Harry directly. But by the time Harry was three, Vernon had broken me. I tried to help Harry when no one, not even Harry would notice. But as a mother and a guardian I was a total failure. Both Harry and Dudley have grown into such fine young men and I can assure you they came out that way despite me."

"Harry?" Hermione asked after a long pause.

"Vernon used to hit me," Harry said, "but he never beat me. Aunt Petunia used to throw me in my Cupboard for no apparent reason. I would then hear Vernon yelling and my Aunt crying and later learned that he was beating her. My Aunt did her best to keep me safe from that man, but I never felt loved even by her, not until years later when she was free of that man. She did love me. I was all she had left of her family, a family she loved and lost. She would later say I reminded her of Lily in so many ways. But she lived in terror of that man."

"So that's why you're a counselor?" Rose asked.

Petunia nodded. "I know how magic can destroy families. I've lived that hell twice. Once with my own parents and sister and later with Harry and Dudley. To be honest, I have seen worse than what I or Harry experienced. But no child deserves the lives I lived or subjected my children to live. This is my penance. This is how I can atone for all the mistakes I made in life. Harry and Dudley have forgiven me, but I must still atone. I have two magical sons, for I have come to see Harry that way finally. I'll soon have two magical Daughters-in-Law and as of right now nine magical grandchildren..."

"Nine?" Hermione asked.

"Teddy, your Harry and Luna and Dudley and Jena's kids."

"They have six?"

"Sorry, guess I left that bit out Love," Harry said. "Dudley and Jena's twins are Harry and Petunia. They are seven. Then there's Alan who's five, Michael is three, Samantha who's almost two and little Rachel who's about three months old."

"I'm home!" a voice boomed out. "What's going on? Where's the chaos?"

"Out back Dear," Petunia said. "We're in here and Jena's out trying to prevent the end of the world."

Hermione saw a large, fit looking blonde haired young man enter the Parlor. "Harry!" he said. "Well, either you lot are early or I'm late."

"They're a little early," Petunia said.

The man walked over to Hermione and offered his hand. "You must be Hermione and Harry's descriptions of you do not do you justice - and no I am not flirting, Mother."

Hermione could not but chuckle at this. "Pleased to meet you Dudley."

"Pleased to see you don't hate me," Dudley said. "And you've met my Mum and she's still in one piece so I can assume you don't hate her either? Not that I'd blame you if you did. We were not nice people to Harry once."

"I ..." Hermione began.

"Thank you," Dudley said softly and sincerely. "My Mum was terrified you'd hate her. I can see you are at least giving her a chance. That means a lot to her and to me. She's part of this world now and Harry's as well and she does not want to lose that again."

"Part of this world?"

"Yes," Petunia said. "I am the only non-magical in my large family. I live in a magical town. Most of my friends are magical. I'm actually dating a wizard. My son teaches at the finest magical school in Britain. I attend all the Quidditch Matches with him and cheer for Gryffindor as it was Harry's House and my Dudley has been made

an honorary member. My life led here and here I am happy again and feel that I have redeemed myself in the eyes of my magical sister. I can never go back to being non-magical anymore than I can go back to being a virgin and I do not wish to. I finally feel close to my Lily again."

"So you must be Hermione's Mum." Dudley said. Rose nodded as she shook the man's hand. "I'm Dudley, Harry's First Cousin. Only my Mum calls me that though. Friends call me Big D or Dud. My Mum wanted to name me Jacob - Jake for short - but my father wanted a 'family' name. Anyway any tea left?" Petunia nodded and Dudley poured him a cup before sitting down.

"So Dud," Hermione began, "how did you come to be a wizard?"

"Ah! The Million Galleon Question," Dudley said with a laugh. "Harry did say you were direct. Well as to that, it's complicated. Not so much the how as the ways I found out.

"I was born a wizard," Dudley began. "I know that now. When my magic was first recognized I was tested. They test all of us, you know. Anyway, a late bloomer usually tests below average in terms of magical ability. If we assume magical ability is on a scale from zero to ten, with true Squibs and non-magicals as a zero and Harry at or near a ten, then the average is a five. True late bloomers test in below that. I tested in around a six point five. That means I must have been tagged as a magical at birth and I was. I got a letter to Hogwarts when I was eleven. My Mum rejected it right off 'cause of my father. So I never knew. She only told me later and I don't blame her. My father would have gone mental - and he did in the end.

"I must have had moments of accidental magic as a child. But we all knew Harry was magical so my guess is it would have been blamed on him. The first time I remember an incident of such magic that could not be blamed on Harry was my first year at Smeltings. I was given a detention by a professor I had come to hate and his hair turned green. I didn't think it was magic and certainly not my magic, still there it was.

"I had terrible grades. It's a wonder I ever advanced a year, really. I'm not stupid. I've proven that since. But my father felt it was more important to be the big boss than the smart one. He hated brainy types and made it clear he would not appreciate a smart nancy boy

in his family. Besides, I am no genius. To do well I would have to work hard at it and I was a lazy git. I was on the brink of expulsion for grades every year and had I kept it up I would have been expelled at 16. I knew it and it began to worry me.

"Beginning of fourth year two things happened - or rather I met two professors who started turning me around. One taught me boxing the other biology. Boxing gave me a release. Before all the stuff I put up with at home, and I loathed my home almost as much as Harry did, I took out on others including Harry. I knew my dad was wrong and what he did to Mum and Harry were wrong. I couldn't do anything to stop it so I beat up others in my frustration. My boxing coach showed me a way to do that without getting in trouble. I guess it was all my rage at my Dad. Always saw his face on my opponent and always beat the tar out of them.

"My biology professor felt I needed something other than books. She saw something in me I had not and recommended me for an externship program at a nearby hospital. I began training and working as a lab technician there and loved it. I worked extra hours and all that - none of it for pay. A few of the doctors took notice and began tutoring me in a way. I learned loads about physiology, internal medicine, immunology and micro-biology from them over time. My marks at school improved dramatically, although I never showed them to my father. Mum knew.

"Summer before Fifth Year is when my life really changed. Told father I was hanging out with my mates to all hours. I wasn't. Once a week mainly. Rest of the time I was putting in twelve hours a day at the hospital. I was still a git though when I was with my old crew. Still hung out, beat on kids for no reason, smoked, drank, that sort of thing. It was on one of my days off that my life truly changed forever. That was the day Harry and I were attacked by Dementors."

"How did that...?" Hermione began.

"Ever been around those bastards?" Dudley asked.

Hermione nodded. She had nearly been killed by them Third Year. She had other encounters, but that was the worst.

"Then you know what they do. I didn't have any really bad memories. Not like Harry had. But deep down I felt really guilty for what I had

done. That's what they did to me. They made me relive everything I had ever done that I knew was wrong and that I felt guilty about - including just about everything my father had paid me to do to Harry. YES PAID ME! I beat Harry up for spending money or toys! No pay, no Harry Hunting. God was I a git!

"I saw the Dementor that attacked me. I knew nothing about them then. I thought it was the Angel of Death and I was a goner watching my life flash before my eyes and all that. I really didn't like my life. After, when Harry left, I was taken to St. Mungo's. They used Muggle Obliviation spells on all of us. Even then my father had to be sedated. Anyway, it worked on Mum and all. Didn't work on me. I heard the Healers talking to Mum telling her that 'cause I was a Muggle, I really would not have suffered all that much. Bit depressed and all and a bit out of sorts, but it's not like I could see the things or suffer through my fears and pains or what not. Only wizards suffered that.

"Except I had. I thought it was some kind of effect from living with Harry. Didn't truly believe I was a wizard too. Still, there were also those strange things that happened at Smeltings and such. But I pushed that to the back of my mind. Of far greater concern was what the Dementor showed me of my life. I was disgusted. Never really talked to my father again after that as I knew he was a big reason why I was the way I was. Father blamed Harry for that. It was his own damned fault.

"Fifth Year I was a changed student. Not top of my class, but well above the middle and my professors were surprised - as was I for that matter. Never told father. I continued to work at the hospital and even increased my hours 'cause I loved the work and all I was learning. Made College Prep on my GSCE's. That stunned everyone and I could not hide it from my father. He just assumed it was meant to be in a way - the idiot.

"Summer after my GSCE's, he wanted me to work at his drill company. That was our first real fight. Told him flat out I was making a mint selling drugs, why would I work for nothing? The drug dealing was a lie. My mates were doing that, but I was still working at the hospital and I knew he'd hate that. Said I'd reconsider for 50,000 pounds and he had a fit, but left me alone in the end and I continued to work for nothing at the hospital. Was offered a full time position

once I finished school doing something I liked. Why throw that away to do something I hated?

"The next summer the War caught up with us. We were sent into hiding. Father lost his job. Mum actually liked the witch who ran our safe house. I was a college prep student working at a local hospital under a new name - and the only one earning a pound. Then Jena walked through the door. She was my age and the most beautiful girl I had ever seen - no offense..."

"None taken," Hermione and Harry said.

"Never believed in that love at first sight tripe," Dudley continued. "But it was something like that. If she was as beautiful inside as she was on the surface - and she is - I knew right then I was a goner. It was obvious to anyone that I was smitten with her - and soon she was with me. She was a first generation witch hiding from the Registration. Father lost it. Forbade me from seeing her and I said I'd rather be with a witch than the bitches he's set me up with. I proposed after six weeks and she accepted. We both agreed to marry after the War. When father realized I was not going to change my mind and wanted what he called a freak for a wife and that Mum was in favor of it, he left us. Divorced Mum sometime later. Best thing that ever happened to us up until then, you ask me.

"Jena was being trained as a Healer. I know she had not taken her NEWTs but she was being trained. Those left fighting needed care and such. Poppy Pomphrey was her mentor as she had been cast out of Hogwarts under the blood purity laws. She was not a Pureblood and as such was not qualified to teach at that school. We had that in common and were always comparing.

"The Final Battle comes. Volunteers were called and by then some fifty families lived at our safe house - more a Manor really. Jena goes in as a Medic and I was not about to be left behind. I had to. For my Mum, for Jena, for Harry, I had to. I did not care that I had no wand then. I had to fight. And I did..."

"And earned the Order of Merlin - First Class for leading the final assault," Harry added.

"Yeah, well...we go here late. The main battle was over and Voldemort had offered a cease fire of sorts as we set to try and sort

ourselves out just outside the gates to Hogwarts. There was no real leader. It was the torches and pitchfork type of a mob at that point. Then Voldemort announces Harry was dead and..."

"And you should have been there," a young blonde woman said with a baby in her arms. Hermione recognized her. It was Jena. All the other children were there as well now. "He gave a speech when all the others were willing to do a runner. Said he would rather die free than live as a slave and off he went and everyone followed. Took out six Death Eaters and a giant before I nearly lost him."

"Big bastard fell on me when I punched him in his sensitive bits," Dudley added. "That landed me in hospital and that was where I learned I was a wizard. Lavender Brown was in the bed next to me and she was in a sad state. I knew a serious staph infection and she had one and the Healers were doing nothing about it. Pissed me off. She had been bitten by a Were and they felt it better that she die?"

"We got Harry to set up the Room of Requirement for us. It was a special isolation Ward and we first worked on stabilizing our patient. Once we were sure she would live, well even before, we worked on a cure. It was so simple in the end. We made a potion using silver chloride as a part of it - that's the chemical they use to develop film. Jena came up with the magical buffer as it is otherwise toxic, but the silver killed the lycanthropy bacteria and Lavender never turned. I used Muggle techniques to isolate that bug and the antibodies that would one day lead to a universal cure."

"And how did you learn you were a wizard?" Hermione asked.

"I was making potions. All kinds. My Mum can prep ingrediants, but can't make a real potion. You have to be magical to do that. Professor McGonagall saw me doing it and - well - I was tested and proven to be a wizard. She checked her files and saw I had been offered to attend, but my Mum had rejected the offer. I spent the next year at Hogwarts getting tutored while Jena and I continued our study of lycanthropy and developed the true cure. I know now you were there as well, but I was in my lab most all the time and never ate in the Great Hall and such so we never met."

"Minerva offered me the Muggle Studies position almost immediately, but I was focused on fixing Lavender and others like her at the time. Once we had the Cure, I accepted her offer with the proviso that I

teach what I felt the students should learn and that the course be mandatory for all children who were not Muggle raised. I went on teaching - and I love to teach - and learning. Got my OWLs and NEWTs already and am close to attaining a Mastery in Potions.

"I should have gone to Hogwarts with Harry. I didn't. But that is my school as much as it is Harry's. Just wish I had, though. I could have been a good Beater on a House Team, I think."

"Why didn't you?" Hermione asked.

"Vernon," Petunia said. "Never told him about Dudley's letter. He would have probably killed us all if I did."

"He was that bad?" Rose asked.

Harry, Dudley and Petunia nodded.

"But," Petunia said, "I have a son who is now a well respected educator who in addition to setting the now national standards for non-magical studies also shares the Dilliard Prize for Healing with his wife, our Healer. That's like the Nobel Prize, if you must know. My Nephew is one of the Young Turks who remade this country. Vernon may never understand or accept it and it's his loss. Dudley, Harry and I have met Her Majesty the Queen. That's something Vernon will never claim. It would have been a feather in his cap, but he never could stand magic. His loss."

"Dud sits on our Educational Standards Board," Harry added. "I have a seat as well due to the Foundation and such, but Dud earned his."

"And what does this Board do?" Hermione asked.

"We look to the future of magical education," Dudley replied. "Right now, that means three things. First is the impact of Harry's Severus System. It will be compulsory in the next year or two. Second, we need a true University and are working hard to create one. Finally, we need to deal with the 'Baby Boom' that is happening."

"What?" Rose and Hermione asked.

"Teddy and Daphne were born in 1998," Harry began, "and are slated to start Hogwarts or a similar school in 2009."

"Similar school?" Hermione asked.

"Most likely Hogwarts, although we will have the option to send them to the local which is King George's College in London. They'll get their Hogwarts letters 'cause they have family who attended. Teddy's parents did and Daphne's sister did. Anyway, their year..." Harry stopped and looked at Dudley.

"Entering class in 2009 will be the smallest in history," Dudley said. "Right now we are looking at twelve students of magical background if we include your Daphne. In the last century or so the average Hogwarts class has about sixty students. Their's will barely be half that and only because first generation magicals tend to be constant. Two thirds of their classmates will probably be from a non-magical family and the same is true for the other schools. Our estimates on sorting is that year Slytherin might get three or four students.

"But, when your son and daughter enter, Hermione, there are now an estimated one hundred students in that year for Hogwarts with similar increases in all schools. First generations will drop to twenty percent or less and drop even further over the next few years."

"Why?"

"Our generation of magical parents are having loads of children" Dudley said. "Our parents had one or two on average. Our generation has at least four and maybe more. It's still to early to tell. Jena and I have six, which used to be considered unusual but now is hardly out of the ordinary"

"What brought this on?" Rose asked.

"No one really knows. Each couple has their own reasons I suppose. Jena and I were only children in a manner of speaking and wanted a large family and I'm not sure we're done after our current six. We make a decent living, as do most these days. Add in the fact that there is now hope for a future and the fact that not one family I've met was untouched by that War ... maybe that explains our baby boom. I don't know. I do know that all schools will have to expect to

double or triple in size soon to accommodate the children. Either that or we open more schools."

"And which way are the winds blowing?" Hermione asked.

"Expansion of existing schools for the most part," Dudley said. "Neither option is cheap, but expansion makes more sense as the students will attend an existing school with existing faculty and resources as opposed to one that begins with nothing."

"Wow!"

The dinner soon followed. From Hermione's perspective the whole day had been amazing in the end. The two families got along really well and it was clear that Daphne, Little Harry and Luna had made new friends - their first in this land aside from Teddy. She did not know which part of the day was better. Her Mum seeing Hogwarts for the first time alone was worth the trip. Meeting McGonagall and Neville and Luna was also worth it. The Zoo was a huge hit with the children. But meeting Harry's family had been her big shock. Of all the changes she had heard about, nothing prepared her for the Dursleys. She left their house pleased that Harry had chosen Dudley to be the Best Man and certain of hope for the future of her homeland.

All in all, it was a brilliant day, she thought as she and Harry climbed into bed... and Harry received further proof that his love was merely pregnant and not broken...

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2006, BLACK LAKE RESORT,
HOGSMEADE, SCOTLAND, U.K.

She awoke with the early morning sun streaming into the windows of their bedroom. She could swear she had not moved an inch from the night before as her head still lay upon his chest and just like when she fell asleep, she was listening to his slow breaths and his heart beating beneath her. Her arm and leg were draped across him and he still held her in his arms. She felt warm, snug, safe and so loved. She did not want to move at all, for this was so perfect.

She had to admit, it was one of the few times she woke up before he did. She did not mind that he usually awoke first, nor that he'd lay there quietly and watch her sleep. It was so sweet in a way, just as this moment was now. And now she knew, this moment would not be fleeting. She would wake up two more times in his arms as his girlfriend and fiancé. The third time would be as his wife and their life together would begin. She sighed quietly. Their life, she thought. She was thirteen again and hoping the boy felt the same about her as she did about him. She remembered all the pain in her life and how that boy usually made it go away. She remembered that day when she had to leave him seemingly forever because - because neither of them wanted to ruin what little they did have for the fortune of a relationship they could have. It was both of their fault that they wandered about for years. But then they found each other again and every minute since had been perfect.

She honestly wondered about her honeymoon. Harry was not saying anything about that. She wondered if they even needed one as every night in his arms had seemed like one to her. It had always been Harry. No other had meant a fraction as much to her as he did practically since the day they had met. He was truly her one and only, as she had never slept with another man before or since in any meaning of the phrase. And he was so wonderful, she sighed. Eros Syndrome notwithstanding, the truth was she was not surprised she was pregnant again. Harry always wanted a family and she was not about to deny him that - especially because with Harry she wanted a large family too.

Today it would begin, she thought. Today there could be no more true hiding from what they were about to become: Husband and

Wife, Mother and Father. As soon as everyone was up, she knew they were going to his Manor...

His having a manor was a shock in and of itself!

There they would have brunch with all the out-of-country guests, most all of whom were friends of hers and her mother. Their families were here as well which meant that most of Daphne, and the Little Ones friends were here as well. But it was not just them. Harry's party would be there as well. He had told her this just before she went to sleep. They were arriving early so that they would be out of the way when the other picnic guests began setting up on Friday. Today would be the brunch and for those who wanted a dinner. The rehearsal dinner would be tomorrow, and the Wedding...

She should be nervous, she thought. A wedding! Her wedding! This time day after tomorrow she would be getting dressed and readied for her day! Deep in her heart, however, she had been married to this man for goodness knows how long even though they had both been apart and in denial. All the wedding was was validation of that which already existed between them and had for years and years. She sighed contentedly.

"Morning," his voice said softly.

She shifted around slightly and stared into his captivating green eyes and smiled at the love of her life.

"Morning. Sleep well?"

"Always with you, Love."

"Me too," she said before giving him the kiss he deserved and then laying her head back down on his chest. "Do we have to get up?" she asked.

"Unfortunately," Harry said. "I hate being a bad host, but we've got a couple of hours before we need to be off."

"A couple of hours?" Hermione asked.

"Mmmm." Harry sighed.

Hermione could not help but shift over so that she was lying atop of him. She knew what she wanted to do for those couple of hours.

"Any idea how to pass the time?" Harry teased.

"If I wasn't already pregnant, I'd say we could get started on making babies," Hermione giggled. "But, making love would do in a pinch."

"You're brilliant as usual," Harry said before pulling her into a kiss.

Who needs a honeymoon, she thought. Every moment like this with Harry was one. Still, a real one would be nice...

Harry and Hermione were several minutes late in meeting her mother and the kids in the hotel lobby. Harry had told them to meet at nine and it was already after nine-thirty when the couple finally graced the world with their presence. Rose did not need magic to realize why these two were late as it was plastered all over their faces. Under other circumstances she might have said something. But she had seen the smile on her daughter's face. A smile that went beyond whatever it was they were doing, for it had never faded much since that day in New York. Her daughter was happy perhaps for the first time in her life and this young man was the reason. Rose was not about to raise a fuss - yet. Oh, she was certainly going to tease Hermione about it. It was her obligation as the woman's mother and friend. But that could wait.

"So," Rose said, "where are we off to today." The expression on her face told Hermione there would be a talk later - maybe. Then again, Hermione's furious blush may have been all that was necessary.

"The Manor," Harry said. "Our overseas guests as well as some of the locals should already be there. I have the staff preparing a brunch for them and we get to meet, eat and greet."

"And how do we get there?"

"Portkey," Harry said.

"Floo not good enough," Hermione chided.

"No, it's not that. But you've never seen my Manor and - well, you'll see."

He pulled out a large hoop from somewhere and pulled his wand saying Portus!

"Right then. Everyone loop the straps from your luggage 'round this hoop." Teddy led the way and the kids had their luggage strapped on even before the adults.

"Harry?"

"Learned the hard way years ago," Harry said. "Dragging luggage on a portkey is not a good idea unless you don't care about losing it. This way, the luggage will get there as well."

Hermione smiled. She had never figured that one out which was why she avoided portkeys for trips.

"Right then," Harry said, "everyone grab on." He watched and made sure that everyone had a grip on the hoop. He then tapped it with his wand and he and the others soon felt the uncomfortable sensation of an activated portkey dragging them through space to some far away destination.

They reemerged in front of the largest house Hermione had ever seen. Okay, she thought, Buckingham Palace was larger, still this was huge!

"Harry? This is your Manor?" There was a hint of accusation in her voice.

"Bit much," Harry agreed. "One of my ancestors had it built. Still, it's a nice place to get away from it all."

"I can see why."

"Y-you own this," Rose asked.

Harry shrugged. "Had an ancestor who was both a bit of a show off and a bit of a spendthrift. Fortunately, even he could not spend money fast enough. Fair few old pureblood lines went broke trying to show off. Rumor is Balmoral used to be a Pureblood estate until the codger went broke. Prince Phillip bought it cheap for his wife Queen Victoria."

"That's Prince Albert Harry," Hermione corrected.

"You know I was rubbish in History," Harry shrugged.

"Still..."

"Rose? Daphne?" Harry asked.

"Yes."

"Keep a close eye on Hermione and make sure she does not go into the Library - at least not until later this summer."

"Why?" the three asked.

"As it is the largest in Magical Britain, we would never see her again," Harry quipped. "I would hate to miss my wedding 'cause my Bride to be disappeared into the stack of books..."

"I'll have you know, Potter," Hermione huffed, "I am not the only lover of books in this family!"

"Fine then," Harry said. "Dara?"

And elf popped in front of them.

"Yes, Milord?"

"Everyone? This is Dara. She is in charge of Staff here at the Manor. Dara? This is Hermione..."

"Yes. We have awaited your arrival for some time," Dara said. "It is a pleasure to meet you at last."

"Thank you," Hermione said.

"And her mother Rose."

"An honor, Madam," Dara said.

"This one here is Daphne. She's Hermione's younger sister."

"Tis and honor, Milady," Dara said with a bow causing Daphne to blush.

"Finally, my son and daughter, Harry and Luna."

"Welcome home, young Master and Mistress," Dara said to the two youngest.

"What am I Dad?" Teddy said, "chopped liver?"

"You're a pain in Dara's neck and you know it Teddy," Harry laughed. "She's known you for a few years, hasn't she?"

"I suppose."

"Right then, Dara. For the next two weeks, no one is allowed in the library for more than one hour a day and no books can leave."

"Harry, that's just cruel," Hermione huffed.

"Once you see it, you will understand," Harry smiled. "You could easily spend years in there. I can say this, you cannot live long enough to read all the books in there. There are over 200,000. And I do want to see you walking down the aisle the day after tomorrow."

"I suppose," Hermione sighed. "But I can spend an hour there today?"

"After the brunch," Harry said with a laugh. "Dara, see to it that their things are brought to their rooms."

"It will be done, Milord."

"Right then, leave your luggage here and follow me," Harry said as he strode off towards the Manor.

They entered the Manor proper and Hermione could not believe her eyes. Harry had tried to prepare her for his ancestor's excess, but this place was beyond her experience. It practically reeked of wealth and privilege and all her family hated, and yet Harry and Teddy were so normal in her opinion. She knew Harry had not grown up with all this - far from it. But Teddy had, yet he seemed normal. It spoke volumes to her about both Harry and his abilities as a parent.

"Teddy?" she asked as they waked through room after room it seemed.

"Yes?" he said.

"You like this house?"

"I like the grounds," Teddy said. "I can fly my broom here. Aside from that it's a bit stuffy. Not really home for me. London is my home."

Harry was a great father, Hermione thought.

They entered another large room.

"JANIE!" a voice cried out.

Hermione looked and saw all her good friends from home practically running to her and soon smothering her in hugs.

"So, who's the lucky man?" Michelle asked.

"This is my Harry," Hermione said. Harry merely nodded.

"Damn! Janie, you luck girl!" Agnes Smith exclaimed. "When we arrived here I was sure it was the money bit. No. He's a hotty."

"Delicate as usual," Megan added. "But yes, you seem to be one lucky gal, Janie."

"Th-thanks," Hermione replied in embarrassment. "Harry? These are my so called friends and bridesmaids," she said with a laugh. "My Matron of Honor Megan Riley."

"It is my pleasure Ma'am," Harry said shaking her hand.

"And he has manners as well." Megan replied.

"He'd better," Hermione growled. "I might not known of it before, but he is an Earl."

"Rich and noble?" another woman asked. "Damn girl, you did hit the lottery!"

"Harry, this is Agnes Smith."

"Got my orders Janie," Agnes said. "We're crossing the pond as well!"

"That's wonderful!" Hermione replied.

Harry was then introduced to several others who were also going to be part of Pak Riley Europe: Brianna Antonelli, Michelle Dunston, and Adriana Garza as well as their husbands who were also being reassigned.

"Jeanette Pinot," the last woman said. "My husband and I are thinking about relocating here. All our friends are moving over. But..."

"I thank you for coming for Hermione's day."

"Oh, that's right," Jeanette said. "She's really Hermione."

"She'll always be our Janie," Megan added. "It's a pity we are not crossing over ... yet. We are working on it, Janie."

"Th-thanks. I really ... I love you guys."

"I hope you realize how lucky you are, Your Highness," Michelle said to Harry.

"Technically, it's My Lord. Not high enough for that 'Your Highness' rubbish. But I hate the pretensions so Harry is just fine," Harry chuckled. "And I am acutely aware as to how lucky I am. I am marrying my childhood sweetheart - finally. This Manor means nothing to me. Hermione is worth more than anything, and she said yes to me. My home is where my Hermione is. It always has been. I'm just a Chief Inspector with the Magical Police, nothing more or less. Until now, of course. Now I am to be her husband and the father of our children. That is a title I am willing to accept."

"Very well, Harry," Michelle said.

"Janie," a new voice said.

Hermione looked and saw someone she had not seen in person for years.

"Amanda?" Hermione asked.

The young woman nodded.

"How did you....?"

"You're beau, Brit Super Cop contacted his friend, Aussie Super Cop, who happens to be my Cousin to track me down so he could make an offer I couldn't refuse."

"He did, did he?" Hermione smiled. She then kissed Harry. "Thank you," she said softly.

Hermione knew that Harry was trying to bring as many of her friends to their Wedding as possible and her mother's friends as well as the Martins were there. But she had not expected Amanda and her family. She had not actually seen Amanda since Sydney, although they had kept in touch ever since by e-mail. To say that she was touched by his thoughtfulness was an understatement. She and to really try not to cry, but somehow she managed.

"Far be it for me not to invite all of your friends," Harry said.

Hermione was then introduced to said Aussie Super Cop and his family and finally to Kevin Malone and his family.

"It is a pleasure to finally meet you," Hermione said honestly. "Harry's told me all about you..."

"I can assure you that they are all lies and propaganda," Kevin chuckled.

"Actually, everything he said was quite complimentary."

"In that case, I admit everything," Kevin chuckled.

The brunch was a resounding success and all the guests enjoyed themselves. Hermione was embarrassed to have to admit that the

guests had probably seen more of the Manor than she had, but that was a short fall that she would rectify later that day. As the brunch began to wind down, Harry stood.

"Your attention please," he said. As soon as he had everyone's attention, or at least all of the adults as there were scores of children in attendance as well it seemed, he continued. "In case anyone missed it, I am Harry Potter and I'd like to welcome all of you to my ancestral home, and no I don't live here year round. Most the year I live in another home in London.

"Saturday happens to be two important dates in my life this year. Months ago, I scheduled it as the date for my annual picnic, a tradition dating back only a couple of years following my return from two years assignment with the F.B.M.I. in the States. I and many of my friends were sent across the Pond by our government to learn and to come back to help continue the reforms to our government, laws and country and I like all of them picked up some bad habits while there. In my case, it was a taste for barbeque, as well as a liking for what many over here call the most boring sport ever. And although I picked up that habit too, I don't mean golf.

"Anyway, my friends and I were assigned throughout the States and all of us took a liking to the local foods. I started this picnic in part so we could kind of show off that, but it is also a chance for us to get together. In addition from several boring government types, I also host the families of our Severus System students who are or have attended a privately funded primary school system here that is very similar to what your children attend back home.

"After running into Hermione - or as many of you know her Janie - and realizing that I have and still love her more than anything, I decided that I've wasted enough of my life without her in it and asked her to marry me."

There was an applause from the room.

"Actually asked her the day we met in New York, although I did not formally propose to her until she arrived her last Saturday. Fortunately for me, she said yes both times.

"Anyway, as everyone I know and care about or at least like attends my annual picnic, I decided - if she was willing - that it would be the

best time for us to tie the knot and for her to make an honest man out of me. Many of you knew about this well before she did as I did not tell her until after my ring was on her finger, and I want to thank you of assisting in my little surprise.

"Most of you are here because you know 'Janie' or her Mum or both. I again want to thank you for coming over to help make her day special."

"You made it bloody easy," a voice joked.

"It was certainly an offer that was hard to refuse," another added earning a laugh from the room.

"For those of you who wish to, a couple of buses will be here in about an hour. One will take you into London for shopping and another for a tour. Otherwise, feel free to enjoy the Manor and the grounds.

"Beginning this afternoon, additional guests will be arriving. Some will be in the wedding party and already know about 'Janie,' others do not and are here because they are also preparing food for the picnic. I would ask that those of you who are here try and keep this cat in the bag at least until the Rehearsal Dinner tomorrow night. However, don't feel as though I might be upset if the 'Surprise Wedding' is not a total surprise.

"The picnic begins at nine on Saturday morning and will continue until the fireworks at midnight. The wedding will be at noon - and don't worry, past experience has shown that all my guests are here early. We are expecting a total of around fifteen hundred. The Wedding will be followed immediately by a brief reception for the guests to meet the wife and kiddies, then the picnic will resume. Dancing begins at 7:30 and for once I will actually have to grace the dance floor with my presence as I am sure Hermione and her Mum - and sister and our daughter - would be most put out if I did not dance with them. Although I use the term grace on my part lightly.

"When we are not actually doing wedding stuff, there will be swimming, games, rides and such for you and your children.

"Finally, to either confirm or dispel any rumors: Yes, Hermione's son and daughter Harry and Luna are actual our children. And, after she accepted my proposal, Hermione told me we are expecting again."

This comment caused a lot of talking and a few shouts of "congratulations."

"There is a story behind it, but I'll let the mother tell that one. That being said, we are both happy with this and while we may have put the cart before the horse more than once, at least we're finally getting around to the horse."

Perhaps under other circumstances, Hermione would be annoyed with Harry. Almost from the moment the brunch had ended until dinner and again for several hours following dinner that day, he had disappeared. That was not entirely true. He was around and she could find him when she wanted to, but he was not with her.

She came to appreciate how special this picnic was even before she had met any of the usual attendees. This was because Harry was so busy making sure everything was set up. A huge, outdoor kitchen needed to be set up for the scores of people who were going to cook to feed the throngs. Most of the "kitchen" was dominated by grills, but there were also gas fed ovens and three huge smokers, one would be used by Harry.

In addition to the tent where Harry and Hermione would be wed, several others had to go up. There were a few that were changing rooms for those who might wish to go swimming, each with a magical shower. There were also restroom tents for servicing rather obvious needs. But many were for games or food.

Then there were the scores of tables where the guests could sit and eat, each was long and could easily seat fifty or more. A huge dance floor with lighting and what looked like a stage for live music also was being set up. The invited wedding guests had their own separate dining area being set up nearby.

Finally, there were the rides. It seemed as if a carnival was descending on Potter Manor as all kinds of rides were being erected behind the manor. In between supervising all this activity, poor Harry also had to start work on his personal contribution to the day. He had over three hundred pounds of ribs and beef brisket to prep and

this was a task he never delegated, she found out. All of the meat would marinate for over twelve hours. He prepared that by hand, no magic. His huge smoker had to be lit hours before the first piece of marinated meat was placed within it. He also had to prepare his rub and his sauce or sauces - she really did not know if there was more than one.

Astoria Malfoy had arrived, with Draco and their kids in tow, early Friday morning to make sure all was in readiness for the wedding. Draco left that task to his wife - it was her job after all - as he began his own contribution to the day: Texas style Chili. Yes, he could probably prepare it in only a few hours, but he believed it should simmer for a long time. As he had actually done well in a couple of competitions his last year in the States, who could argue?

And there were other guests to meet. They began showing up Thursday afternoon and although most would arrive Saturday, including children, there would be close to four hundred at the Manor by sunset Friday. There was actually a camp ground set up for the guests with the magically expanded tents that had all the amenities.

Hermione ran into more people she had once known than she was expecting. She did her best to keep out of the way and largely out of circulation as she did not want to answer too many questions until after she and Harry were husband and wife. Still, even though Harry's library restrictions proved to be a small prank, she could not hide there as she did have two kids to keep an eye on. Besides, many of the people she was meeting had been her friends. It seemed the entire D.A., the secret student organization she had helped form during the war, was there by Friday night. Many had seemed to marry other members, but not all. Most had jobs within the Ministry, but not all.

Hermione avoided the questions about her and Harry to the best of her ability. Many really did not ask. They were just glad that she was back and that she was healthy and safe. She had no qualms about introducing people to the children, when they were around which was not often. Despite everything that was happening and the seeming chaos, Harry and Teddy had found the time to teach Daphne, Little Harry and Luna how to sit a broom. The kids loved it and as there were soon plenty of adults to keep an eye on them ... as much as Hermione hated flying like that, the smiles on her kids

faces prevented her from getting too upset. That and the fact that her mother thought it was brilliant.

Minerva McGonagall arrived Thursday evening with the Hogwarts crew: the Dursleys, Madam Pomphrey (who pulled Hermione aside to make sure she was okay being pregnant and all) Neville and Luna and Hagrid. Meeting Hagrid again after so many years was something she would remember for a long time.

She had just left the library as dinner was about to be served to all who were there. She was amazed at the collection. Unlike Hogwarts, the Potter library was not limited to magical works. The non-magical collection contained books she knew would cost a fortune. She knew there were Special Collection Curators who would die for a chance to view some of the books on the shelves. Charles Dickens novels, for example. Not only did the library contain the first bound editions, it also contained the original versions. His novels were originally published a chapter at a time in a literary magazine or newspaper and every such periodical was in this library. Hermione was not the only one as her mother loved books as well - as did at least some of the other guests. Outside of the British Library, this Library might well be the most important collection of English Literature in the world. Hermione and Rose and others wondered aloud how this had come to pass.

They were not really reading anything, just looking at the vast collection and, in their own minds, cataloging its contents. It was in both of their minds mind blowing. All the collection seemed to be missing were the original manuscripts. Then they found some. Jane Austin apparently had sent copies of some of her rough drafts after the final works were published. They were filled with line outs and corrections in her own hand and even complete chapters that Hermione knew were never published. They were accompanied by a letter to Edwina Potter, who apparently was both a close friend and fan of the works. The value and significance of the manuscripts was not lost on the two women and they both vowed to read them one day.

They were exiting the library when they almost literally ran into Hagrid.

"Hagrid," Hermione exclaimed.

The nine foot tall half-giant looked at her.

"H-Hermione?"

Hermione nodded.

"Oh Sweet Merlin's Ghost! Is it really you?" Even Rose could see the bushy haired, bushy bearded giant of a man was crying.

"It is," Hermione said.

"An' all this time, they was sayin' you was dead," the huge man said, now crying. "Where ya been?"

"What?" Hermione said as she found herself in a Hagrid embrace. "No hello?"

"Sorry 'bout tha'," Hagrid conceded. "When yer done wen' off 'er such, I... 'Tis good ter see yer again, Hermione."

"Hagrid?" Hermione replied, "This is my Mum, Rose. I left to find her and my family."

"Hermione's told me a lot about you, Hagrid," Rose said. "We met your brother Grawp yesterday."

"Pleasure ter meet ya," Hagrid replied. "Met me brother? 'E never said nothing 'bout it. Then again, on'y jus' got back an' turned 'round an' came 'ere. Still, where ya been?"

"Living in the States," Hermione said. "Long story."

"Not s'much as a letter to a friend," Hagrid said.

"Wrote to Harry a lot," Hermione replied. "Unfortunately, someone was intercepting the post."

"Tha' some-ern bein' one Ginny?"

Hermione nodded.

"Worse mistake Harry made, if'n you pardon. Bes' thing 'e ever did riddin' 'imself o' that un."

"So, what'd ya think of Grawpy," Hagrid said focusing on Rose. Both women could see he was trying not to cry.

"Perfect gentleman," Rose said. "The kids loved him."

"Kids?"

"My younger sister Daphne, she's eight, and my son and daughter Harry and Luna, they're six."

"Yer a Mum?"

Hermione nodded.

"So who's yer husband?"

"Oh, I'm not married yet."

"Yer not?"

Hermione shook her head.

"So some bloke got yer in a family way an' lef' yer?"

"The bloke never knew," Hermione said softly.

"Yer never tol' 'im?"

"I - I wrote to him, but I was too far away to see him and he never go the etters."

"So 'e never knew?"

"He didn't. Not until recently."

"So 'e knows now? An' I suspects 'e wants nothing' ter do with 'em? Probably married an' all that?"

"He was married. Not anymore."

"An' yer stuck an' yer young 'uns 'ave no Dad," Hagrid said. Hermione could see he was upset. "That git! Sorry, no offense, but

ter leave yer like this? "E have any idea how special yer are, Hermione, 'e'd a married yer in a heartbeat. If'n I ever meet the prat, I'll thump 'im but good fer ya."

"Hagrid, calm down!" Hermione said. "It's not that bad."

"Not that bad! Yer come back after all these years, two kids, an' all an' a git is out there who..." Hagrid's face was red. "Weren't Ron was it?"

"No Hagrid it was not and please calm down."

"It ain't right, Hermione. Not right 'tall."

"Hagrid! Please listen to me!"

"Sorry, Hermione. It's jus' - I always - yer a friend and all that."

"Thanks. I always thought the same as you."

"Yer don't deserve what 'appened, Hermione."

"Hagrid!" Hermione said trying not to lose her patience with her old friend.

"Sorry," Hagrid said meekly.

"You remember the names of my two children?"

"Harry and Luna," Hagrid said.

"My son is named after his father."

"Not Harry! I can't believe it! He'd never..."

Hermione nodded. "It's Harry, Hagrid. I might have gone out with Ron, but I've only been with Harry that way! I wrote to him and told him all about them, but he never received my letters. I wrote to him for years. He never received a single one. I ..." her voice hitched, "like you I thought he didn't care or didn't want to know. I knew he had married Ginny and I thought..."

"I was wrong, Hagrid. I did not know. I ran into Harry in New York about a month ago and I told him. Then my Mum surprised me and brought my kids to be with me and he met them. He does care. It's not his fault and..."

"And we are getting married tomorrow."

"Yer what?" Hagrid gasped in shock.

"Harry and I are getting married tomorrow. And no, it's not for the children. We realized what we should have years ago. We are in love and have been for goodness know how long..."

"Ever'body knew that," Hagrid said.

"Everyone except the two who should have known. We met, we realized and now we are finally doing what we should have done years ago, kids or no kids."

"An' why didn't yer know? Or Harry...Oh. It were Ginny, weren't it?"

Hermione nodded.

"I'll thump 'er good next time I sees 'er."

"I don't think that's necessary," Hermione replied.

"Yer happy then?"

"Very. We are very happy, Hagrid."

"An Harry an yer young 'uns?"

"They love each other very much, Hagrid."

"An' Teddy?"

"I think he loves being the big brother. He's teaching them to fly."

Hagrid pulled out a handkerchief that for most would have been the size of a small table cloth and blew his nose. "I am 'appy fer ya. Yer back, an' you an' Harry..." he said as he blew his nose again. "Can I meet the young uns?"

"Of course, Hagrid."

FRIDAY, JULY 28, 2006 - MILAN, ITALY

Ginny reached for the owl that had arrived at her hotel room and removed the letter from its leg. England had advanced to the Quarter Finals in the World Cup and were set to play a very strong Italian team in the morning. They were now in the elimination round. If they lost, they went home. She was on probation and to mess this up, she would not just dash the hopes of the England faithful, she would be out of Quidditch forever and she knew it. Still, she knew something was happening back home involving Harry and had asked her "friends" for news. She opened the letter

Ginny:

Granger is back. Rumor is she and Harry are an item. They have two kids already and are getting married soon. Thought you'd like to know.

Cho.

Ginny stared at the letter. Cho was an insane gossip and also did not like her as she had not been what Cho had expected - a true lover. But if this was true? It couldn't be! If it was it would have been all over the front page of just about every paper in Europe. But if it was? Damn it all! There was nothing she could do until this sodding tournament was over! No, she corrected herself. The terms of her probation with the League were clear. Even if England lost tomorrow, she still had to finish the season before she could do anything! Cho had to be lying. It would have been in the press. And Kids? That was proof positive that the Seeker for the Chudley Cannons was just trying to give her team a better shot at the playoffs once the season resumed!

CHAPTER THIRTY

SATURDAY, JULY 29, 2006 - POTTER MANOR OUTSIDE OXFORD, U.K.

"Janie?" Rose Granger asked as she opened the door to the small dressing room just off the main Ballroom of the Manor. It was called the Bridal Room as, by tradition, it is where a bride dressed on the morning of her Wedding at Potter Manor. By Potter House custom, the bride was dressed and primped by the trusted female House Elves. Today, Darla was working on the dress and her mother Winky, Hermione's hair. Winky had told Hermione that, aside from perhaps a little mascara to thicken her eyelashes (waterproof for Winky said the odds of Hermione not crying at some point during the Wedding were long indeed) and a subdued lipstick, there was little that needed to be done in the make-up department. The hair, however. Hermione remembered chuckling at that. Although her hair was not nearly as unruly and bushy as it had once been, it was still a nightmare to work with. She knew Harry could care less, he seemed to love playing with it absently, but she wanted to be pretty for him - especially today - their Wedding Day.

"Janie?" Rose asked again. "Can we come in?"

"Sure, Mum," Hermione replied.

"We are almost finished, we is," Darla said.

"The Mistress shall be wonderful," Winky added.

"Hermione, the Wedding," Rose began.

"Starts at noon, I know Mother! Harry timed it so he would have plenty of time to get back to his ribs by two or so. Can't believe my wedding is a ruddy picnic!"

"I thought you were okay with that idea."

"I was ... I am ... bother! I don't know!"

"Is something wrong?"

"No. Not really. It's just..."

"Just what? You want this don't you?"

"I've wanted this for goodness knows how long, Mum. But now that it's here, I'm..."

"Nervous?"

Hermione nodded. "It's just ... you know how I hate being the center of attention and..."

"Hermione, this is normal."

"Is it? Were you so nervous you were afraid to stand up? Is it nerves? I mean I am pregnant you know. Maybe it's just hormones. I don't know."

"It's normal, Hermione. To be honest, I needed to eat a whole box of breath mints before I walked down the aisle."

"Why?"

"I was so nervous I tossed my cookies. And no, as you know I was not pregnant. You'll do fine, Love."

"Hmmp. So you just came in here to speed me a long or something? Perhaps to drive me to re-taste breakfast? I can assure you it doesn't taste nearly as good the second time!"

"No Love," Rose said, "that's not what I meant. I've been checking on the arrangements."

"And?"

"Your wedding will be unforgettable! The site is beautiful, the tent so elegant. You'll never mind the fact that the guests are all in tee shirts and shorts because the rest of it is perfect! Every detail is perfect, right down to the - er - Binder?"

"I believe that's what they call the Ministry approved Celebrant."

"I've just met with Father O'Leary and..."

'Father O'Leary? I thought this was a magical..."

"He's a wizard, Dear. He is also the pastor of the local Catholic chapel. You didn't tell me Harry was..." Of course, Rose already knew this. She was just wondering why Hermione had not mentioned it.

"I never asked, honestly. He might have told me, but I really didn't think anything of it. I mean, with everything else that has been happening, that is a pretty insignificant detail. I mean, I - damn I do recall something about a dispensation and all that. It just never dawned on me that..."

"Well, Harry is. When he stays here, he's a member of this Parish. He attends St. Mary's in London. But, he says, 'Darts' O'Leary is his favorite cleric so he asked the good Father to marry you. Pulled some strings, the Father did. Got a dispensation from the Bishop. This one counts, Hermione."

"What? How? Why?"

"The Father knew that you would not feel right not being married in the Church. Harry told him so, so a few strings were pulled and such."

"But Mum," Hermione said, "I never told Harry I was Catholic! I never even knew he was!"

"Harry told me that once, during the War when all seemed as hopeless as things could be, you were standing watch while he was supposed to be sleeping. He could not sleep and he heard you. You were whispering the Rosary, Love. He's known and knew by that you would want it to count before both God and the Law. He wanted you to have this, he said."

Hermione stood and turned to her mother. Her mother had never seen her daughter look so beautiful. "You look like an angel, Dear," Rose said.

Hermione was crying.

"What's wrong?"

"Harry! How - why - I don't deserve him, Mum! I don't! What have I ever done to deserve someone so thoughtful and perfect?"

"You love him, Dear. You love him for him and not for who or what he was. That's why you deserve him - and he most certainly deserves you. It's just the pre-wedding jitters, Girl. I had them as well. Spent an hour throwing up the morning of my wedding I did!"

"I did too, Mum. But I'll never know if that was the jitters as you say. I am pregnant and have been losing my breakfast now for over two weeks. At least it's not every day anymore. I expect to for at least a couple more given my last time. Still..."

"Still. Don't fret, Love. When he sees you as you are now, he's going to pass out and die smiling. You are so beautiful, Hermione Jane. I always prayed for your perfect wedding. I see now, yours will exceed even my own fantasies!"

"I hope you're right, Mum! Mum?"

"Yes Love?"

"You look pretty too."

"Thank you. I do try now and then!"

"Harry," Molly Weasley exclaimed as she saw him in the main entry to Potter Manor. She rushed forward and pulled him into a hug. Her husband, Harry, saw, was but a few paces behind.

"Ron's told us you two have made up - a bit," Molly said. "Finally! One big family again!"

"Ron and I are a ways away from being like before, but yes, Molly, things are better."

"And who is this Janie he and Lav are all on about - and her kids as well? Should I hear wedding bells in your future?"

"I hope so."

"I am so sorry about..."

"Molly, that's in the past. How's she doing?"

"Slutting around, as usual," Molly Weasley said. "Honestly, even Ronald at his worst was not that bad. Best thing you did, Dear, getting that annulment. Pity she did not learn from it. Anyway, so how are you?"

"Brilliant."

"Will we meet this Janie?"

"Today, in fact."

"So looking forward to it!"

"Thank you. Can I borrow your husband for a bit, Molly?"

"Sure. Everyone's out back?"

"Of course."

"See you in a bit, Arthur," she said as she walked towards the picnic.

Harry led Arthur Weasley into another room, sealed the doors and magically prevented even the most skilled from eavesdropping.

"Harry," Arthur Weasley asked, "is something wrong?"

"No, nothing," Harry replied. "I just need to ask you a huge favor and I want your word, whether you agree to do it or not, nothing I say here leaves this room until everyone knows, okay?"

"Harry, what are you on about?"

"A surprise! A nice one, really. But, from here on out, what I say is Top Secret, okay?"

"I suppose."

"Okay?" Harry said more forcefully. "Not even Molly can know, not until it happens, agreed?"

"Harry, why me?"

"Agreed?"

"Okay, fine. Nothing shall pass my lips."

"If you can't agree, I'll find someone else," Harry began. "Although the secret will be revealed within the hour, I am willing to demand and Unbreakable Vow in the meantime, Arthur."

"That important?"

"To those involved, yes."

"Okay, I agree. What's going on?"

"There's a couple who have asked me to allow them to get married here today. I have agreed on the condition that the wedding is a secret until announced. All here will be invited."

"Do I know them?"

"I should say so, but for now, I am not going to tell you who they are. But the bride's father passed away some years ago and would like to have someone escort her down the aisle in her father's stead and she asked for you."

"Do I know her?"

"I don't know," Harry replied - lying. "But she knows of you and thinks you would - well - she knows you are a wonderful father and that most everyone here knows that. It would be a great honor for her if you would accept."

"I have nothing to wear," Arthur Weasley protested!

"My House shall fix that, if you agree."

"I'd like to meet the young lady before..."

"And if she is - er - acceptable? Will you agree to do her this favor?"

Arthur nodded.

"Through that door, Sir."

"You're not coming?"

"No Sir."

"Okay. I'll at least meet with her."

"Thank you, Arthur," Harry said as he turned to leave. Well, Arthur Weasley thought, it's not Harry and this mystery Janie. Harry is dressed picnic style. I am sure, if it was him, he'd be in dress robes or whatever the Muggle formal attire is.

Arthur walked to the door and knocked.

"Come in," a woman's voice responded.

Arthur walked in and saw two little girls in pink dresses, six young women in similar dresses and a woman perhaps a few years younger than him in a lovely blue dress. He did not recognize the girls - although one reminded him of a very young Hermione Granger. The only woman he recognized but could not place was the oldest one in the blue dress. A final woman, dressed in white, sitting with her back to him. The bride to be, he thought. She looked wonderful - or at least her hair and dress did. All brides should, he thought. The bride turned around. She had a huge smile on her face. Arthur Weasley recognized her almost immediately.

"As I live and breath," he exclaimed, "Hermione?"

The young woman practically leapt up from her chair and ran into his arms.

"You look, well, you look beautiful Hermione!"

"Thanks. So," Hermione said, "will you?"

"Your father passed?"

"Yes. A few months before I reached Australia. Cancer."

"I am so sorry, child."

"Nothing to do about it," Hermione said. "Now, you've met my Mum before," she added breaking the hug and pointing to the older woman.

"Indeed, but it's been a while. Sorry for your loss, Madam."

"For every loss, there is a gain," Rose Granger replied. "It is nice to see you again, Arthur."

"These are my bridesmaids, Hermione said introducing him to the six younger women. "They are friends of mine from St. Louis," she explained. "And these two lovelies are my flower girls."

"The one who people think is my daughter is my sister Daphne. She's eight and - well - me again. The shorter one is my daughter Luna."

"You are a mother?"

"Of two - twins, really. Her brother Harry is going to be one of the Ringbearers."

"Harry?"

"Named after his father, of course," Hermione said.

"Bloody hell! How? When?"

"Surely you know the how. As to when? Three days. Three perfect days when Harry and I were broken up from your son and daughter. The three days - less actually - after Molly tried to get things back to what she thought was normal. The three perfect days in the seven years since - until Harry and I ran into each other again a little over a month ago in New York. Ran into Ron and Lav and their kids as well."

"I am known by some here by the name I've lived under since I left Britain. I am Janie. Surely you've heard of me..."

"Harry's the groom?"

"Of course!"

"I never understood why you two never got together, Hermione. Never. You two seemed so perfect together. Molly had her own ideas - I never agreed. I'm happy for you, Dear. Pleased for the two of you that you finally figured it all out..."

"We each figured it out years ago, but we lost each other. Seems your daughter was binning the letters I sent Harry. Harry doesn't think she read them. I happen to agree, still."

"She did that?"

"Until a month ago we had written each other but never heard from each other. Three years ago, I stopped actually mailing my letters. Harry did not know where I was and thought that I no longer wanted to be his friend, but wrote me anyway just in case. I wrote him and thought he did not care for me or for our babies. We were both wrong. We both thought the other did not and never had loved us - not like we did with them. We were both wrong. We were young and each of us had our own problems admitting to ourselves how we had felt about each other for years. We were such good friends that we were both afraid to ruin that. We each knew - at the same time - our first kiss - that we were hopelessly in love with the other. But we could not or would not tell the other - afraid of being hurt and ruining what we did have if we crossed that line. We should have. We were young and silly."

"I am sorry, Hermione."

"Don't be," Rose Granger said. "As Harry said when he asked for my blessing, it is better late than never."

"Will you escort me, Arthur?"

"I'd be honored," he said tearing up. "I always considered you two part of my family, you know."

"I know. That's why I asked Harry to..."

"I'm not dressed for..."

"We'll fix that," Hermione said.

OUTSIDE

"Ladies and Gentleman," Harry's voice boomed over a loudspeaker, "and children of all ages! I have told most of you this year's picnic has a special surprise! You are all invited to join with us and attend the wedding of two friends of mine! Please enter the tent set up over to the left of the lake. And do not worry about your attire! The bride and groom are just happy to have you here for their special day!"

"You look handsome, dear," Lavender said adjusting the tie around her husband's neck.

"Five galleons that Harry flubs his lines," Ron said with a wink.

"Doubt it."

"Hermione then?"

"No bet," Lavender replied. "Five your Mum is rendered speechless for at least ten minutes after it's obvious whose getting hitched - five more says your Dad is giving the Bride away."

"Deal," Ron replied.

The guests for the picnic had begun to cue up and enter the tent. Molly Weasley found Harry and asked him: "Who, who are they?"

"Can't tell you," Harry said. "They want it to be a surprise, okay?"

"Where's my husband," she said starting to look around.

"Molly, he's been asked to escort the bride and give her away," Harry said. "The bride's father passed away years ago and she thought your husband would make - well, he'd be perfect."

"But he's not dressed for..."

"The couple is not so concerned, Molly. Now go and find a seat, please?"

"Okay, I guess." Molly followed the crowd into the tent.

IN THE WEDDING TENT

"Madam Weasley?" A high pitched voice asked.

Molly looked and saw a House Elf. "Yes," she responded.

"Front row to the right," the Elf replied. "Groom's side, if you would Madam!"

"Where's my husband?" Molly asked.

"He shall be with you directly," the elf replied. "He's to give away the Bride, Madam. Her father passed years ago and the Bride asked him to stand in her father's stead and he agreed. Take your seat, if you please, Madam Weasley."

Molly took her seat just as music began to fill the air. She looked at the source and saw what she knew to be a non-magical instrument known as a piano being played by none other than the Squib - a child of no magical ability born of witch or wizard - a former member of the Order - Arabella Fig. She played that Muggle piano slowly yet beautifully, Molly thought. A much younger woman, her son's classmate's new wife stood and began to sing:

"Ave Maria..."

Molly recognized the language as Latin, but was overwhelmed by the music. Molly loved the songs of Celine Dion, but this song blew it all away. She understood little of it, but was left in tears. She looked around at the tent, everything was white. There were white roses and carnations everywhere it seemed. It was beautiful, elegant, perfect, she thought still wondering who the couple was. Then, the music changed and two new people stood in as the singer searched for a seat. As these two sang, it was obvious that the wedding party approached. As the first chord rang from the piano, the groom popped in by apparition. His back was to everyone, but his hair reminded Molly of her semi-surrogate son and former son-in-law, Harry Potter. It couldn't be, she thought. True, after the disaster that had been his marriage to her daughter, Molly hoped it was him, that he had finally found his one true love, but it could not be! Not today! Harry would have told her, wouldn't he?

There was now a couple singing. It was Draco Malfoy and his wife Astoria:

Is this the little girl I carried,
Is this the little boy at play,...

The song continued as the wedding party proceeded to the front. In the lead was a young, blond haired man who was maybe Harry and Ron's age. Molly did not recognize the young man at all. She thought she recognized the woman, but could not place her. The woman looked to be a little older. She did not recognize either of them but it seemed clear to Molly they were not related. They were, however, obviously the Best Man and Maid or - more likely - Matron of Honor. Behind them, other "couples" followed. She did not recognize any of the bridesmaids at all, but could tell they were witches. The next two groomsmen she recognized, although was surprised to see them in the same wedding party: Dean Thomas and Draco Malfoy. The fourth groomsman was an older chap she did not recognize at all. Then came her son, Ron Weasley which only added to the confusion, although she doubted now that this was Harry's wedding. Ron and Harry had not been on speaking terms in years. She did not recognize the final groomsman nor the two young boys acting as ring bearers or the two young flower girls, although the older of the two girls reminded her a little of Hermione Granger.

As the last arrived in their dresses and tuxedos - for that's what the boys or men were wearing - not magical dress robes, an organ started the traditional "Wedding March." Molly stood with all the others and turned to see the Bride. Her dress, Molly saw, was amazing! She was angelic in it, whoever she was. A veil of white silk covered her face as Molly's husband escorted her to the front. Molly looked and saw for the first time the face of the Groom - her jaw almost hit the floor! It was Harry! Harry Potter! She could see the huge smile on his face, she knew he was happy - maybe amazed. She thought back to another wedding day years ago, when Harry had married her only daughter. She remembered he had not looked nearly as happy or smiled as brightly then as he did now. Arthur had been right! Whoever this woman was, she was Harry's one true love. Molly thought as the tears filled her eyes. Harry has found it, she thought - happiness! But with whom? Was this the Janie she had heard about and if so, who was she?

She recognized the celebrant from somewhere. He stood before Arthur and Harry and the Bride and wore a cleric's collar, but he looked familiar. He nodded to Molly's husband Arthur and Arthur lifted the veil, but as the Bride was facing away from Molly and

everyone else, she could not see the face of this woman who seemed to take the breath from her Harry, her surrogate seventh son. She saw a smile on her husband's face as Arthur leaned in and kissed this Bride on the cheek - it was even more special than when he had done the same years ago for his own daughter. Molly could tell that her husband knew there was a difference with this one. This woman, whoever she was, was Harry's one true love. She knew that Arthur knew this was the case just by his expression as he stepped away.

"Dearly beloved," the Celebrant began, "for those of you who do not know me, I am Father O'Leary, Pastor of St. Michaels down the road and - at least during the summers, Harry is one of my parishioners. I am also a wizard and a duly appointed Binder.

"We have gathered here today as a community, at the behest of one of our own to celebrate life and all that it has to offer. We came here for that - and the wonderful food," he chuckled - "as we have these last few years. We are here as one a large family. Today, by joyous circumstance and perhaps in no small part for our fellowship, we are now asked to support and bear witness to the union of one of our own to the love of his life and she to the love of hers.

"And who is it who offers this woman up for marriage?"

"At her request," Arthur said, "having lost her father years ago and as her friend and second father in my heart, I do."

"Do you consent to this union?"

"On her behalf and for her, I do."

"If there is any among you who can speak and testify as to why these two cannot be legally bound and wed, speak now or forever keep your peace."

There was no answer.

"Harry," Father O'Leary continued, "will you take your bride's hands and turn and face each other for the vows?"

The couple did as they were told. For the first time everyone could clearly see who the bride was. Molly was speechless. But whispers

of others more than made up for it. "Merlin's Beard! That's Hermione Granger!" "I thought she was supposed to be dead or something." Molly could not speak at all. Hermione looked absolutely radiant and her smile - well it was her wedding day, wasn't it? She should smile like that.

"Harry James," Father O'Leary continued, "do you stand before us today of your own free will?"

"I do," Harry replied.

"Do you, Harry James, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poor in sickness and in health from this day forward?"

"I do."

"Do you, Harry James, promise to love, honor and cherish her forsaking all other for as long as you both shall live?"

"I do."

"Hermione Jane, do you stand before us of your own free will?"

"I do," Hermione replied with tears in her voice.

"Do you, Hermione Jane, accept this man as your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poor in sickness and in health from this day forward?"

"I do."

"Do you, Hermione Jane, promise to love, honor and cherish him forsaking all other for as long as you both shall live?"

"I do."

After a pause, Father O'Leary continued. "The exchanging of rings between bride and groom is an ancient custom throughout Europe. It is believed it dates back to the Greeks - or maybe even the Druids. The ring is a circle, a mystical shape, one with neither a beginning nor an end. It is infinite. Made of precious metals, ones that neither tarnish nor wear away, it is said that they too are infinite. The rings

symbolize the everlasting and un-diminishing love a husband and wife should have for one another. For they are tasked with bringing into this world the next generation and they cannot or should not raise their children alone. Marriage is both about love and about the prospect of its result - children. The rings please?"

Dudley handed the Father two rings.

"Harry," Father O'Leary asked? Harry nodded and took Hermione's ring. "Place it on her finger and repeat after me:"

Harry did as he was told.

"I Harry James," Father O'Leary said.

"I Harry James..."

"Take you Hermione Jane."

"Take you Hermione Jane..."

"To be my lawfully wedded wife."

"To be my lawfully wedded wife."

"With this ring, a symbol of my everlasting affection and devotion..."

"With this ring, a symbol of my everlasting affection and devotion..."

"I to thee am bound and wed."

"I to thee am bound and wed."

Harry looked into his bride's eyes and she was crying. She barely made it through her turn with the rings. Harry by then was crying too. Bloody hell, Harry thought. I never thought I could be this happy!

"With the speaking of the vows and promises," Father O'Leary now intoned, "and the exchanging of rings before these witnesses, the bonds of marriage are now complete under the eyes of God and the Law. That which God had brought together, may no man rent asunder. By the power vested in me under God and by Law, I now pronounce you Husband and Wife! You may..."

The couple did not wait and were kissing almost as soon as the Father said "Wife." Father O'Leary laughed before finishing with "Ah - Kiss the Bride." The guests stood and applauded, although neither Harry nor Hermione really heard any of it.

A very loud honk sounded through the tent and those how bothered to look saw the largest man many had ever met crying his eyes out in the back row. Seeing Hagrid, Hermione could not help but smile at the gentle friend she had known all those years ago.

After what seemed like endless photographs both by a professional photographer for their album and a photographer for The Quibbler, the only press allowed at a Harry Potter function, the bride and groom retired to the Ballroom in the Manor to receive their guests. The wedding party was with them, along with their spouses, Daphne, Teddy, Harry and Luna being the exceptions and they stood with Harry, Hermione and Rose. Many who passed through the line Hermione remembered, but there were far more she knew she had never met before.

Minerva had been one of the first.

"You look lovely, Dear," she said.

"Thanks," Hermione said with a blush.

"Never knew Draco could sing that well, did you?"

"No. But it was lovely."

"You really do have a lot of friends here, you know. A lot of people worked hard to pull this off."

"I know. I've thanked most of them already. Then again, most either were in the wedding party or married to it."

Minerva chuckled. "Tis true. Well, as this event has hours to go, we'll have plenty of time to chat later. And I'll try to make sure later is before the dancing. I know you are going to be - er - preoccupied after that starts, yes?"

Hermione blushed and nodded.

"You cost me fifty quid, Granger," a male's voice said.

"George?" Hermione asked the red headed man. "Angelina?"

"She's still on top of things," George Weasley said to his wife.

"And you thought otherwise," Angelina quipped.

"Well, considering she was supposed to be dead and all..."

"Hey," Hermione said. "I am right here! And what's this about fifty quid?"

"Angelina bet me fifty that one this was Harry's wedding and two we actually knew the mystery bride. I thought no way Harry getting married could be kept secret for more than ten minutes. Seems I was wrong."

"Seems so," Hermione chuckled. "You should know that Ron and Lavender have known for weeks."

"Get out! My own bro holding out on me?"

Hermione shrugged.

George laughed. "Oi Ron," he called out, "you finally out pranked me!"

"Had to happen sooner or later," Ron shot back.

"You're so going to get it one day!" George added as he moved off.

"I can't believe it's you," a tearful woman said drawing Hermione into a bone crushing hug.

"Mrs. Weasley?" Hermione asked.

"They said you died?"

"No. Just didn't come back."

"And why on earth not?"

"My dad had died. My Mum had a little one year old daughter and she did not want to return. I had no reason to without my family, so..."

"I'm sorry about all that."

Hermione simply waived it off. "I ran into Ron and Lavender in New York the same day I met Harry again after all these years. It's fine, Molly. I'm happy for him."

"I never thought I'd say this, but that wife of his is the best thing that ever happened to him."

Hermione nodded in agreement. "I would never have had the patience to wait for him to grow up. He has, hasn't he."

Molly nodded. "I felt so sorry for her for so long. After I got over her being - you know. But she really did reap what she sowed. She turned him into a wonderful man and all. Goodness knows, as much as I tried, Ron is really Lavender's creation."

Hermione nodded for even she knew this was true.

"I will admit I was floored when I saw it was you," Molly said.

"I think that was Harry's idea," Hermione smiled back. "To be honest, I think he wanted to out prank the Marauders and..."

"He certainly did," Molly chuckled. "And Ron and Lav knew all about it for ages? Amazing. So, who are these lovelies? I know Teddy, but..."

"This is my sister Daphne," Hermione started.

"She and I were born at the exact same time," Teddy added.

"You were?"

The two nodded. "But I was born in Australia," Daphne said. "Teddy was born here."

"And these other two?"

"My son Harry and daughter Luna," Hermione said. "They're both six."

"Twins?"

Hermione nodded.

"And their father? I take it you're divorced?"

"Nope. I married their father and we never divorced."

"But how...Harry?"

Hermione nodded.

"Please tell me it was after you and Harry had broken up with Ron and Ginny."

"It was."

Molly nodded. "And you didn't..."

"I wrote Harry for over three years telling him about them. He never got the letters."

"Why not?"

"You should probably ask your daughter," Harry said.

"I'm sorry Harry."

"I know."

"Erm, when did you first tell him?"

"He found out a little over a month ago when we met again," Hermione said. "But he would have received my letter..."

"About the time Ginny made up with me," Harry finished. "Odd that. Hermione wrote me at least every month until about a month or two before it all ended."

"You think she read them?"

Harry shrugged. "Honestly, given her personality, I doubt it. She would have said something during one of her rants. But, I do think she knew about the letters and is the reason why I never got them."

"Harry? Had you gotten the letter about...?"

"It would have come in late August. Long before I made my big mistake. I would probably have dumped your daughter and been off to find Hermione. But I didn't get it and ... well."

"I'm sorry, you two. And I'm glad I learned this now rather than sooner."

"Why?" they asked.

"I know now you were meant to be together. I knew the moment Harry saw you walk down the aisle. Ginny never made him smile like that. And I saw it again when I saw your face, Hermione. Ginny never looked at Harry like that. You two looked like you're meant to be together. Ginny looked like she was entitled and Harry looked like he was settling, in hindsight. I am sorry. Had I seen it ... I don't know. Maybe."

"Maybe," they agreed as Molly moved off realizing she was holding up the line.

"And you must be the lovely bride," a deep and aristocratic voice said. Hermione looked at the owner and both she and her mother, who stood next to her were struck dumb.

"Hermione? Rose?" Harry said. "I would like to introduce you to a friend of mine and a benefactor to my family Foundation: Charles, The Prince of Wales."

"Mum sends her regrets, Harry," Charles said. "Short notice."

"Then I guess I should be grateful you are in annual attendance."

"Why not? Your press could care less and this is one day when I and my sons are decidedly out of the limelight. It's nice being upstaged by the formerly most eligible wizard from time to time."

The rest of the day was a blur to Hermione. Were it not for the photos, she might not have remembered much of it at all. She remembered the picnic, mainly because the food was so good. She remembered cutting the cake with Harry and sharing their first slice, and how neither rammed it into the other's face. She remembered when Harry announced to everyone that Little Harry and Luna were their kids and how pleased she was at the reception from the guests. But she could not recall much else as it was all a blur.

But she did and would always remember her two perfect dances with Harry. She had more than two, of course and danced with more men than she had ever done so before. But her first dance with Harry and her last that night just as the fireworks exploded overhead were the memories of that day that would last. Although there were over a thousand people around, for those two moments, it was just her and Harry in their own private world. She only vaguely remembered Dudley's toast and Harry's toast and announcement that they were indeed expecting again. It was the altar and the dance floor that she remembered perfectly. The photos of Harry dancing with her Mum, sister and daughter that night would forever be among her favorites, right after her wedding photos and Harry and her dancing the night away...

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

3 July 2053

"That's it?" the girl exclaimed.

"Now Emily," her mother replied, "what more did you want?"

"Em's right Mum," the boy replied. "It just ends right there?"

"John, your Gran decided there was just right. She wrote this book a long time ago and agonized over the ending and decided in the end that's where it should end."

"But what happened after?" Amy, the youngest of the three asked. "Did they live happily ever after?"

"What do you think, Amy?" the mother asked.

"I hope so, but it doesn't say!" the littlest pouted.

"Would it help if I told you this story is true?"

"It is?" the three asked.

Their mother nodded. "It's the story about your Gran and Gramps. It was the first book you Gran wrote when she became an author. Do you think they had a happily ever after, Amy?"

"Yeah."

"That's real?" Emily asked in shock. "But it's so weird! I mean they lose each other for years, there're kids he doesn't know about and then they meet thousands of miles from their real homes by pure accident and are married a month later? Love doesn't work like that does it?"

"It did for them," their mother said. "But remember, they had been in love for a long time before but for various reasons never told the other. Then all that other stuff happened so that when they were finally ready, they never heard from each other again for a long time."

"But what happened after?" Emily asked. "Did they go on their honeymoon? Where did he take her? Was it wonderful?"

"Who cares?" John complained. "I want to know if that Ginny person snuffed it! Maybe she got run over by a bus. Better yet, maybe that giant tossed her to the dragons!"

"John," his mother said, "the villain doesn't always have to die."

"Okay then, how about a real nasty disease that makes her bald and ugly!"

The woman rolled her eyes. "Okay then. Yes, they went on their honeymoon, Emily. That was one of the reasons Gran stopped it right there. She said it was wonderful, but also very private and felt she really should just leave it alone. I mean, the whole idea was how they lost each other and found each other again. The after she left to the readers to imagine for themselves. But they didn't go right away."

"Why not?" Emily asked.

"Because Harry's birthday was two days after the wedding. He had never celebrated birthdays with your Aunt Luna or Uncle Harry before and they had never been there for his. He had missed years of Grandma Hermione's birthdays and Christmas and all that and he was never going to miss them again. So they stayed at the Manor and had a family party for Harry. Great-gran Rose, Daphne and your Uncle Teddy were there as well. The next day, they went on their honeymoon but it was only for three days."

"Why?" Emily asked.

"Because your Dad promised the kids they would go see a baseball game in St. Louis and go as a family for two weeks in Disney World before the school started."

"Where'd they go?" Emily asked.

"Well, there was one place in Europe Grandma Hermione had never been to that she had always wanted to see. Granddad Harry had been there, but liked it too. So he surprised her. He made her put on

a blindfold when they went to the International Portal and she couldn't take it off until they stepped through."

"Where?" Emily pleaded.

"Rome."

"Where's that?" Amy asked.

"It's in Italy, stupid," John replied.

"I'M NOT STUPID!"

"John, if you can't say something nice," the boy's mother began.

"Sorry," the boy said.

"What'd they do?" Emily asked.

"Well, they walked around a bit, but Grandma Hermione wasn't always feeling well because of her babies. They still saw a lot, held hands all the time and kissed a lot..."

"GROSS!" the boy said.

"One day you might not think so," the mother teased.

"Doubt it. Okay, so what about that Ginny person? Did she snuff it? Did she try and ruin their trip and get hexed into oblivion by Granddad? Or maybe it was her brother who did it?"

"She didn't snuff it, John," the mother said. "She's still alive as far as I know."

"Well, that's no fun. What happened?"

"She was playing the World Cup in Lisbon at the time. Now as I understand it, she read about the wedding in the paper the day Harry and Hermione left for Rome and on her day off went back to England to her Mum to yell about how this couldn't happen and stuff, except her Mum was not at home and she didn't know where anyone else lived. Harry and Hermione left from Rome and went straight to St. Louis where Rose and the kids were waiting, so there

was no way Ginny could run into them even if she could have found out where they lived. She went back to her team.

"In the finals something happened. Ginny had a great career and had an uncanny record of never getting hit by a bludger or seriously injured. England was playing Brazil for the Cup. She scored several goals, then got hit in the head by a bludger, fell something like ten meters or more and never got up again."

"See!" the boy said, "she snuffed it!"

"No, but she was hurt real bad. Some people say she was distracted by the wedding. Maybe. But she was in hospital for a long time and for a while they weren't sure if she would ever walk again. She would, but her Quidditch career was over."

"Did England win anyway?" John asked.

"You know your cousin Edward would know."

"Mum!"

"No, they lost."

"Oh. So what happened to her."

"She left England," the woman said. "No one saw or heard from her in years. She turned up about fifteen years later at her parents' home with a husband and three children and seemed happy enough. She was living in New Zealand, I think. She stayed for a week, although not many visited. We didn't. Then she left and hasn't been seen since."

"Boring," the boy complained.

"So what happened next?" Amy asked.

"She wasn't seen again," the mother said.

"That's not what I meant! I meant with Gran and Granddad."

"Well, they came back from their holiday with the kids and the kids started school and Granddad went back to Special Operations and Major Crimes and Gran began working at Pak-Riley London."

"Oh come on, Mum!" Emily moaned.

"Fine. In March 2007, your Uncle Sirius was born. A few months later, Granddad Harry became head of his Department and stayed in that job for a long time until he retired. The Ministry kept trying to promote him, but he refused. He never needed the money and liked his job so he stayed where he was at. Mum was doing really well at Pak-Riley, but when your Aunt Lily and Uncle James were born in December 2008, she quit."

"Why?"

"Because she knew she was going to have more babies and she had done the working Mum thing with babies before and decided she wanted to do something else. She took care of us, but was also involved in House Elf Rights and began writing her books, eventually making more writing than she ever did working at Pak-Riley."

"Aunt Emily..."

"Who I'm named after," Emily said.

"That's right," the mother replied, "well she was born in September 2010. Uncle Neville was born in June 2012. Uncle Ron and Aunt Cynthia were born in April 2014 and I was born in January 2016."

"And named Hermione," Amy said.

Hermione nodded. "Mum and Dad thought it made sense. Their first born was named Harry after his dad and I was last. You know Gran loves her books and Harry and I were the bookends."

"And then what?" Amy asked.

"Well, when I was seven, Dad retired from his job with the Ministry and became the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor at Hogwarts. He taught all of us except your Grand Aunt Daphne, Uncle Teddy, Uncle Harry and Aunt Luna as they had all finished by

the time he started. Now you know Uncle Teddy now has Granddad's old job at Hogwarts and Granddad's Headmaster."

"And he won't let you get away with nothing," Emily complained.

"And he didn't when I was there either," Hermione agreed with a laugh.

"So all this happened 'cause they ran into each other at a restaurant?" John asked.

"Dad said he always had two kinds of luck in life, bad and good. For a long time it seemed it was bad luck. He had to fight in a war when he was not much older than you, John. He lost friends. He saw them die. He let his Hermione go and married the wrong woman. But after his breakfast in New York with her back in 2006, he says he has had nothing but good luck. We should all be so lucky."

"Hermione Dear?" a voice called and she saw her husband. "You lot ready?"

"We are."

"Do we have to go?" John asked.

"Yes we do," Hermione said. "We came have way around the world to be with Grandmum when she says goodbye."

"I guess," the kid sulked.

A large crowd had seemed to gather at the graveyard overlooking the Indian Ocean. From a distance, one would not know it was just the immediate family. Hermione Jane Potter was the oldest person present and the only one who had ever been here before, or at least the only one who remembered. She and her husband of forty-seven years led the procession followed by her sister Daphne and her husband of thirty years, their children, grandchildren and even a few babies, their great-grandchildren. Hermione carried a small urn in her arms as her Harry had an arm around her shoulder. They walked up to a single gravestone that seemed even after all this time to stand apart from the others. Hermione and the others looked at it.

WENDELL WILKENS

14 NOVEMBER 1949 – 19 JUNE 1999

Loving Father & Husband

Little Princess: if you are reading
this, remember I will love you
always ... Daddy

"Hello Daddy," Hermione said. "It's been a long time. The last time I was here ..." her voice hitched slightly "... I thought I was so alone. I thought it was my fault you died before I could say goodbye and my fault you were buried under another name. I was scared. I was single. I was pregnant. I thought my life was ruined. But Mum was there for me. She was there through everything. She was there when my babies were born. She was there the day I again found the love of my life and the father of all my babies. She was there the day we married and was with us every step of our journey. And I tried to be there for her to make up for those years when I was not there with you two or for you. I was there to be a big sister to Daphne and I hope I did a good job."

"She did, Daddy," the other older women said.

"Well, I'm back again, Daddy. Your family is here to say goodbye to Mum who passed away two weeks ago back home in Britain. She was ninety-eight and had a full life. She asked us to bring her back to you so she can rest beside the sea where you and she were happy. I hope you can see the wonderful family she raised. You have fifteen grandchildren. They are all here today with their husbands and wives and their forty-five children and three grandchildren. Mum was proud of all of us. Daphne and I are proud of all of them. You can rest easy now, Daddy. Daphne and I know you will always love us just as we will always love our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. You can rest easy now, Daddy. We've brought your Rosie home to you."

Hermione raised her wand and made a swishing motion and the urn disappeared into the ground. Then she and Daphne together pointed their wands at the headstone. There was a flash of light, and it changed. There was a new inscription:

Robert Alan Granger
14 November 1949 – 19 June 1999

Loving Father & Husband

Little Princess: if you are reading
this, remember I will love you
always ... Daddy

The stone had expanded and there was another inscription beside
the first:

Rosalyn Marie Granger
12 December 1954 – 16 June 2053

Loving Wife, Mother & Friend

For Love Is Truly Eternal ... Mummy.

"Goodbye, Mum," Hermione said. "One day we shall see each other
again. Goodbye Daddy. Keep Mum happy until we join you."

She stepped back and watched as the rest of the family said their
goodbye's in turn.